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Topic: The first 1000 days, infant feeding, and early childhood development

Title: Assessment of educational material concerning the first 1,000 days of a child's life, among primary caregivers in the Breede Valley, Western Cape, South Africa

Presentation Type: Oral

The first 1000 days of life, from pregnancy to a child's second birthday, is seen as a critical window for nutrition interventions. The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in collaboration with the Directorate Nutrition, National Department of Health (NDoH), developed educational material in the form of a Z-folder, containing information about the importance of the first 1,000 days. The Z-folder had not been field-tested for comprehension and acceptability prior to printing.

Focus groups discussions were conducted with primary caregivers of young children or pregnant women residing in Zwelethemba and Avian Park, two vulnerable communities in the Breede Valley.

The colorful pictures and convenient form of the Z-folder made a positive impression on the participants. None of the participants had heard of "the first 1,000 days" concept but it was received with interest. A need for more extensive nutrition information on the pregnancy period was expressed. The participants valued the importance of breastfeeding; however poor exclusive breastfeeding practices in the two communities were attributed to cultural beliefs and/or low self-efficacy. The printed images of growth charts, similar to that in the Road-to-Health-Booklet, a South African child health assessment tool, were regarded as wasted space which could be used more effectively. The Z-folder was regarded as useful and the importance of active distribution of such printed material was emphasized.

The study reinforced the importance of testing educational material, before it is printed and distributed to the public. Recommendations for improvement of the Z-folder will be made to the NDOH and GAIN.