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Title: Effectiveness of dietary guidance in improving female primary caregivers' food selection practices and nutritional status of children

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Introduction: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) developed Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) counseling cards and these are currently the standard in nutrition education in Uganda though their effectiveness has not been studied. This study was designed to assess effectiveness of IYCF cards in communicating appropriate complementary child-feeding practices to caregivers in comparison to a food guide plate that emphasizes the concepts of dietary diversity, proportionality and diet balance.

Methods: It was a controlled comparative intervention trial involving three distant child-caregiver groups (n=40) each exposed to one treatment, namely: nutrition education using a three-food group guide (FG), nutrition education using age appropriate IYCF counseling cards; and hair plaiting sessions (control group).

Results: Female primary caregivers in FG group had more improvement in nutrition knowledge compared to those in the IYCF cards group (mean difference for knowledge = 3.93; P = 0.000) and the control group (mean difference for knowledge = 12.16; p = 0.000) while children in FG group were given more variety of animal-source, high protein foods than those in the IYCF cards group (Mean difference = 0.22; p = 0.02). Children in FG had significantly higher improvement in child feeding practices indicated by child feeding index (CFI) scores compared to the Hair plaiting group (mean CFI difference = 1.1; p = 0.001)

Conclusion: A food guide is more likely to improve nutrition knowledge and food selection practices of primary caregivers than IYCF counseling cards. So, there is need to integrate the two for better dietary guidance.