

Assessment of knowledge, and practices of urban women towards folic acid fortified maize meal in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Neural tube defects (NTDs) are the second most common birth defects in humans and are associated with high rates of neonatal mortality, morbidity, disability, psychological and economic costs. Roughly 200,000 neonates are born with NTDs in low- and middle-income countries. To reduce the risks associated with NTDs, pregnant women are recommended to supplement their diets with folate tablets or to consume foods fortified with folic acid. Despite the introduction of a mandatory fortification program of maize meal with folic acid, in Zimbabwe, there is a paucity of literature about the perceptions of individuals towards fortified foods, as well as the storage and processing practices of fortified maize meal. This study aimed to assess the knowledge, as well as, storage and processing practices of folic acidfortified maize meal in urban poor women. Data on knowledge and practices on fortified maize was gathered using a structured questionnaire from 630 women of childbearing age from low-income suburbs in Kwekwe town, Zimbabwe. The results showed that a paltry 26.3% of the respondents knew about folic acid, 22.5% knew about the effects of folic acid deficiency, 13.8% knew foodstuffs containing folic acid, 4% knew about food fortification and 35.6% had bought and used folic acid fortified maize meal before. Availability and accessibility were the main drivers to purchasing fortified maize meal (90%). There was no significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between age and folic acid knowledge as well as between level of education and folic acid knowledge. Furthermore, the result indicates that the households were engaged in poor storage practices of the folic acid fortified maize meal. There was a significant relationship between the level of education and knowledge about food fortification. In conclusion, urban women's knowledge regarding folic acid and fortified maize meal is very low in Zimbabwe and households also store the folic acid fortified maize meal under conditions that speed deterioration of the folic acid. Folic acid awareness campaigns are recommended for people to benefit from the government of Zimbabwe's fortification programme.

Key words: Neural tube defects, maize, folate, deficiency, fortification, women