Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the level of nutrition knowledge, attitude and practices and nutritional status of school-going children in a semi arid food insecure Machakos District, Kenya. A cross-sectional study was conducted in 15 randomly selected primary schools. A sample size of 350 pupils was used. Stratified sampling method was used to select pupils by class and gender. Structured questionnaires, focus-group discussion guide, observation checklist and anthropometry were used to collect data. Data was analysed by SPSS version 11 and Nutri-Survey computer packages. The WHO 2006 growth standards were used to interpret nutrition data. A P-value of (P<0.05) was considered significant. Significantly (P<0.05) more females (83.1%) than males (64.3%) formed the bulk of those without secondary education. About 56.1% of pupils’ parents were involved in casual labour. About 39.1% of the pupils’ households had pit latrines made of banana/grass walls, earthen floor and no roof while 16.4% of the households disposed household refuse in open fields. Aspects of nutrition knowledge, attitude and practices measured included; nutritive value of food, hygiene and safety, cooking methods, food selection for different groups, food production and food preservation. Researcher administered validated performance tests on nutrition knowledge and attitude levels showed that 4.6%, 37.6% and 57.8% of pupils scored average, poor and very poor respectively indicating lack of adequate nutrition knowledge. Cultural beliefs, taboos and attitudes negatively affected nutrition practices. About 8.8%, 22.9% and 64.3% of pupils made food related decisions, prepared meals and washed up at home respectively. About 14.5%, 28.9% and 3.9% of the pupils were underweight (Weight-for-Age), stunted (Height-for-Age) and wasted (Weight-for-Height) respectively. Nutrition education in primary schools has to be strengthened if any country has to effectively address malnutrition.