

Abstract

Globally, scholarly and development interventions underscore the significance of women empowerment in children's wellbeing and addressing nutrition related issues at individual and household level. However, the focus on the combined effect of contextual factors such as gender role attitudes, socioeconomic factors and women empowerment, has received limited attention. This therefore limits interventions from effectively addressing inequalities between women and men that perpetuate poor dietary outcomes for children. This research presents an integrated assessment of the relationship between women empowerment, woman, husband and household characteristics, and their combined impact on the dietary diversity of under-five-year-old children in Iganga and Bugiri districts in eastern Uganda, drawing evidence from both scoping review and quantitative methodologies. The scoping review investigated the relationships between dietary diversity at both household and individual levels and various aspects of women's empowerment across three continents. The study revealed a global link between women empowerment, children's dietary diversity, nutrition status, and household food security. The review emphasizes that the resources dimension of women empowerment is most dominant factor associated with dietary diversity. Specifically, studies stressed resource availability and control, coupled with education, to be probable indicators for improving dietary outcomes. The cross-sectional study, involving 445 women from Iganga and Bugiri districts in eastern Uganda was collected using a modified version of project level women empowerment in Agriculture index tool. Additional modules included ICT use, dietary diversity, gender role attitudes and other socio-economic status of women, husband and household was administered through semi-structured interviews. Findings from the study uncover a prevalent state of disempowerment, with 84.72 % of women failing to achieve empowerment. From their mean scores (0.54), 62.3% of the women were in the high empowerment end indicating that they were above the average empowerment score. The study emphasizes the influence of women's empowerment on shaping the dietary diversity of children. Empowered women exhibited increased child consumption of breast milk, eggs, and legumes, seeds, and nuts. Furthermore, the study indicates that women's empowerment through asset ownership and egalitarianism beliefs promoting women working outside the home positively associated with children's Dietary Diversity Scores of children of different age groups. Additionally, women with egalitarian beliefs of raising sons and daughters for equal future opportunities provided better diets to their children. However, women's autonomy in income and beliefs opposing men's overall position in major household decisions shows an inverse relationship with dietary diversity. Specifically, ownership of large livestock, mechanized farm equipment and small consumer durables increased chances of higher DDS for the infants. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions addressing specific empowerment indicators and promotion of egalitarianism on roles of men and women to enhance women's empowerment and improve child dietary diversity for children of different age groups. Development interventions should prioritize promoting women's empowerment, particularly through asset ownership, emphasize training for women, and carefully promote strategies that enhance household incomes and access to produce markets. Lastly, a call is made for interventions promoting strategies that address gender norms and stereotypes that especially hinder women's work beyond the home for enhancement of better diets amongst children.