

ABSTRACT:

Introduction: Sixty four percent of Uganda's old population are poor compared to thirty eight percent globally thus at a risk of geriatric malnutrition(WHO, 2010). This is indistinguishable with Kween people of Uganda where 84.3% depend on subsistence farming WHO(UHP, 2012). Consequently, poverty associated with poor diet predisposes the elderly to geriatric malnutrition and related illnesses such as hypertension, diabetes, heart diseases, stroke, trachoma and blindness which would otherwise be prevented by proper diet and healthcare.

Objectives : To establish the underlying factors influencing the geriatric nutritional status in Kween district; Eastern Uganda.

Methods: A cross sectional survey involving the geriatric persons 50 years and above was carried out in Kween district, Eastern Uganda (July- September 2014). Data was collected by structured, food frequency questionnaires (FFQ) and included socio-demographics, food security and dietary intake. The geriatric nutritional status was assessed by anthropometric methods (weight, height, and mid upper arm circumference (MUAC) measurements).

Results: A total of 250 geriatric persons, most being male (53.6%) and minority female (46.4%) where most of them were aged 61-70 years followed by those of 50-60 years (37.6%), 71-80 years were 9.6% and none above eighty years. Most of the respondents were in monogamous (67.6%) family types with most having more than 6 children(49.6%), had no formal education(43.2%) though 38.8% ended in primary thus majority (86%) were unemployed. A significant proportion (58.8%) weighed 51-70kgs though most(71.2%) had moderate loss of appetite in the previous 3 months and 44% didn't know if they lost or gained weight in the same period with a significant number of the population(32.8%) having a BMI less than 19 therefore, indicating that majority were thin and thus underweight. Almost

all(98.0%) correspondents were able to get out of bed/wheel chair and had dementia (70.0%) though most of them (87.2%) neither took more than 3 prescription drugs per day nor had pressure sores(92.4%). Majority of the respondents (44.8%) ate only 2 full meals per day which were dominantly eaten only at breakfast and supper times (40.0%) being posho/matoke/sweet potatoes(73.2%) as the most staple foods and beans/green vegetables/eggplant(39.2%) as the most important relishes which were mostly prepared by boiling (99.2%). Additionally, most respondents(80.8%) sometimes ran out of food before they could get more from their gardens or market, 74.8% sometimes had to borrow money,76.4% sold their non productive assets or limited the amount (80.8%) they ate to ensure food adequacy. Nevertheless even with all the attempts to have adequate food, most of their children sometimes skipped meals (91.2%) and 82.8 % sometimes got worried that they were not having enough diet.

Conclusions: The geriatric nutritional status in Kween district was poor and could be due to low socio-economic status, inadequate information/knowledge, poverty and low educational levels.

Recommendations: To improve the nutrition status of geriatric persons in Kween district, interventions should target at raising their socio - economic status through extending the social Assistance grant for Empowerment (SAGE) to Kween district, providing information and education all aimed at alleviating their poverty levels.