

Perceptions on Mothers Who Drink Beer in Relation to Nutrition of their Under- Five Children: A Case of Selected Villages in Chongwe District of Lusaka Province, Zambia

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to respond to many questions that are asked about how effective a mother is in relation to nutrition of the under-five children if she drinks beer. Further, perceptions on mothers who drink beer and the health of their under- five children appears to be closely linked, not only in Chongwe District but in many districts that have women taking beer. The study suggests that mothers who drink beer have little time to cook for their children, particularly, those in under- five category. This phenomenon creates a scenario whereby many under-five children are virtually malnourished. The study had three objectives; (1) To detect the perceptions about mothers who drink beer. (2) To identify difficulties that mothers who drink beer face in relation with the nutrition of their under-five children. (3) To evaluate measures that can mitigate challenges which mothers of the under-five children have in relation to nutrition of these under- fives. A descriptive survey research was used, incorporating a mixed methods approach. To answer questions, subjects were selected by two types of sampling techniques; random and purposive sampling. The study used questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions to gather data in the study. Findings of the study indicated that mother's attentiveness to the child was missing because of beer drinking. This resulted into among others, poor nutrition, diseases and delinquency. The study therefore recommended that health authorities and community leaders should organize culturally sensitive education programs to raise awareness about the effects of maternal alcohol consumption on child nutrition and development.

Keywords: Balanced Diet, Beer Drinking, Nutrition, Food Poisoning and Malnourishment.

1. INTRODUCTION

The nutritional status of under-five children is a critical indicator of a nation's health and development (UNICEF, 2021). In Zambia, particularly in rural districts like Chongwe, various socio-cultural and behavioral factors influence child nutrition outcomes (CSO et al., 2019). One emerging concern is the perception of mothers who consume alcohol, especially beer, and how this behavior may relate to the health and nutrition of their young children. Drinking among mothers may be viewed negatively by the community, potentially leading to stigma, reduced caregiving capacity, or neglect of proper child-feeding practices, all of which can impact child health outcomes (WHO, 2018). Understanding these perceptions is crucial in identifying the underlying social and behavioral dynamics that contribute to malnutrition and health disparities among under-five children.

The relationship between maternal behaviour and child nutrition has long been a subject of interest in public health and social sciences. Research has shown that a mother's health behaviour, including substance use, significantly impact the well-being and development of her children. In the context of developing regions where nutritional deficiencies among young children are prevalent, understanding the factors that influence child nutrition is critical (Namunyola & Chanda, 2023). Several studies have indicated that maternal alcohol consumption can adversely affect child health and nutrition. According to O'Leary (2013), alcohol consumption during pregnancy can lead to fetal alcohol spectrum disorders which are associated with developmental delays and nutritional deficiencies. Although the study focuses on the broader impacts of alcohol on child health, it highlights potential risks associated with maternal alcohol consumption. Furthermore, Parry et al (2011) discuss the cultural acceptance of alcohol use among women in various African communities noting that societal attitudes can influence drinking behaviours and consequently, maternal and child health outcomes.

Understanding the socio-cultural context is essential when examining health behaviours such as alcohol consumption and eating habits (Kamanga et al., 2025). In many African societies, including Zambia, drinking alcohol can be laden with cultural significance and social implications. According to Schensul, et al (2019), social norms and community perceptions play a crucial role in shaping individual behaviours. In the selected villages of Chongwe District, these perceptions may influence not only the drinking habits of women but also community attitudes towards women who drink. This dynamic can affect both maternal health practices and child nutrition indirectly through social support systems and stigmatization.

This study focused on selected villages in Chongwe District, exploring how community members perceive mothers who drink beer and the perceived or real effects on the nutritional status of their young children. By examining local attitudes, beliefs, and experiences, the study sought to uncover how maternal drinking behavior intersects with caregiving practices, food security, and access to health services (Mosha & Phiri, 2020). The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the social factors that affect child nutrition and may inform targeted interventions aimed at promoting healthier maternal behaviors and improving early childhood nutrition in rural communities (Ngwira & Kabaso, 2021).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Malnutrition among under-five children remains a serious public health challenge in Zambia, particularly in rural areas like Chongwe District (MoH, 2017; Mulenga, 2020). Maternal behaviors, including alcohol consumption, have been identified as key risk factors that can adversely affect child health and nutrition outcomes (Parry et al., 2019). In many rural communities, mothers who drink beer are often perceived as neglecting their childcare responsibilities, which may contribute to poor feeding practices, delayed health-seeking behavior, and increased vulnerability to malnutrition among young children (Chiboola & Silukuni, 2018). However, limited research exists that directly explores how these community perceptions influence the nutritional status of under-five children in rural Zambian settings. Understanding the social perceptions surrounding maternal alcohol consumption is crucial for addressing broader child nutrition challenges. Community beliefs can either support or hinder interventions aimed at improving maternal and child health (Tembo & Kakoma, 2021). Failure to consider such socio-cultural factors may result in ineffective nutrition programs that do not fully tackle the behavioral drivers of malnutrition. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the perceptions of mothers who drink beer and examine how these perceptions relate to the nutrition of under-five children in selected villages of Chongwe District.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions on mothers who drink beer in relation to the nutrition of their under- five children.

1.3 Research Objectives

The following were the objectives of the study:

- (i) To assess the perceptions on mothers who drink beer in relation to the nutrition of their under- five children.
- (ii) To identify challenges that mothers who drink beer face in relation to the nutrition of the under- five children.
- (iii) To detect measures to mitigate challenges which mothers who drink beer face in relation to the nutrition of these under-five children.

1.4 Research questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- (i) What are the perceptions people have on mothers who drink beer in relation to the nutrition of their under- five children?
- (ii) What challenges do mothers who drink beer have in relation to the nutrition of their under- five children?
- (iii) How can stakeholders help mitigate beer drinking by mothers so that they concentrate on the feeding of their under- five children?

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is significant because it addresses a critical gap in understanding how community perceptions of maternal alcohol consumption influence child nutrition outcomes in rural Zambia, specifically in Chongwe District. By examining local beliefs and attitudes towards mothers who drink beer, the research will provide valuable insights into the social and behavioral factors affecting the nutritional status of under-five children. The findings will help policymakers, health practitioners, and community leaders design more culturally sensitive and targeted interventions aimed at improving maternal behaviors and promoting better child nutrition. Furthermore, the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on child health in rural contexts, offering a basis for future research on the intersection of social perceptions, maternal practices, and child development outcome.

1.6 Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the Social Ecological Model (SEM), which emphasizes the complex interplay between individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors in influencing behaviors and outcomes (McLeroy et al., 1988). The SEM is appropriate because it recognizes that maternal drinking behavior and the resulting child nutrition outcomes are not shaped solely by individual choices but are deeply influenced by social norms, community perceptions, cultural beliefs, and environmental factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Golden & Earp, 2012). At the individual level, a mother's knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward alcohol consumption can directly affect child care practices (WHO, 2018). Interpersonally, family and peer attitudes may either reinforce or discourage drinking behaviors (Parry et al., 2019). At the community level, prevailing perceptions and judgments about mothers who drink beer can influence access to social support systems and health services. At the societal level, broader structural factors such as poverty, gender inequality, and access to education also contribute to both alcohol consumption patterns and child nutrition outcomes (Tembo & Kakoma, 2021). By applying the Social Ecological Model, this study comprehensively explored how different layers of influence affect the nutrition of under-five children in the context of maternal drinking behavior in rural Zambia.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study used a research design known as descriptive survey and a mixed methods approach. It aimed at receiving maximum insights from a survey that would use in- depth qualitative interviews to collect its data. In this survey research, the study was committed to the use of questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion to gather information, bearing in mind the goal to understand the characteristic of the population (Christen & Johnson, 2012). Descriptive research like this one was committed to describing subjects and the activity that created a 'problem' for research. The method measured, classified, analyzed, compared and interpreted data that was collected. Such data was collected directly from the respondents and so it provided, as Msabila & Nalaila (2013) say, " a deeper understanding and explanation of a situation in a natural setting".

2.2 Research site

This research study was conducted in five villages of Chongwe District. Chongwe District lies about 40 kilometers east of Lusaka and shares boundaries with Chibombo and Rufunsa, besides Lusaka District. Most of the people in Chongwe are Soli, although there are many other tribes as it is a semi- rural agricultural district. Most of the villages are scattered apart from each other.

2.3 Study population and sample size

Study population (also known as target population) included all mothers who drank beer and had under- five children at that time. They were drawn across the five villages of Chongwe District irrespective of their status. The sample size was 45 mothers of the under-five children drawn from the target population, see table 1 below showing villages targeted in Chongwe district:

TABLE 1: SITES WHERE RESPONDENTS CAME FROM

SN	Village	Respondents
1.	Mang'onje village	10
2.	Yuda village	08
3.	Guduza village	09
4.	Mijoni village	07
5.	Mbondo village	11
	Total	45

2.4 sampling technique

A non- probability sampling procedure known as purposive sampling was used to select participants who were all mothers of the under- five children drawn from five villages as seen in the table above. Mothers were picked with the help of some community leaders.

2.5 Data collection instruments

Questionnaires were used on subjects who were literate and in certain cases, were workers of some kind. There were 15 questionnaires that were administered to this group. Semi-structured interview schedule was administered to subjects who were youthful mothers of the under-five children, single among some dropped out of school. This interview instrument has advantage over the structured one because it comprises both open and close- ended questions which seek a respondent give in-depth information.

In focus group, the researcher prepared a few questions which would be given to specially formed groups. In this category were mothers who were not literate and to great extent barely survived life. There were 3 groups of 5 people and each respondent is expected to answer at least 5 questions. The role of the researcher here is to facilitate the discussion and moderate it ensuring vocal participants do not dominate the discussion.

2.6 Data analysis

Data analysis for this study combined quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data obtained were analyzed using SPSS and Excel to compute descriptive statistics and visualize findings on gastric issues and nutritional practices. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to nutrition interventions. The analysis involved data cleaning, reduction and editing in readiness for analysis. This data was put into emerging themes and categories. This was done by going through interviews and secondary data to identify information that answered both the general and specific objectives. This, then facilitated in- depth analysis of the reasons behind poor nutrition of the under- five in Chongwe villages.

2.7 Ethical consideration

Letters of authority were sought from Rockview University School of Education, Post Graduate Studies to the District Commissioner, to Royal Highness and village head persons. Permission was further sought from participants themselves before engaging them into a study. Assurance was given that no harm, neither physical nor emotional pain would be inflicted on them. Assurance was further given that findings of the research would be used for academic purposes only and that confidentiality would be adhered to, that names of the subjects were to be withheld and that pseudonyms would be used instead.

3. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

3.1 Perceptions on Mothers who Drink Beer in Relation to the Nutrition of their Under- Five Children

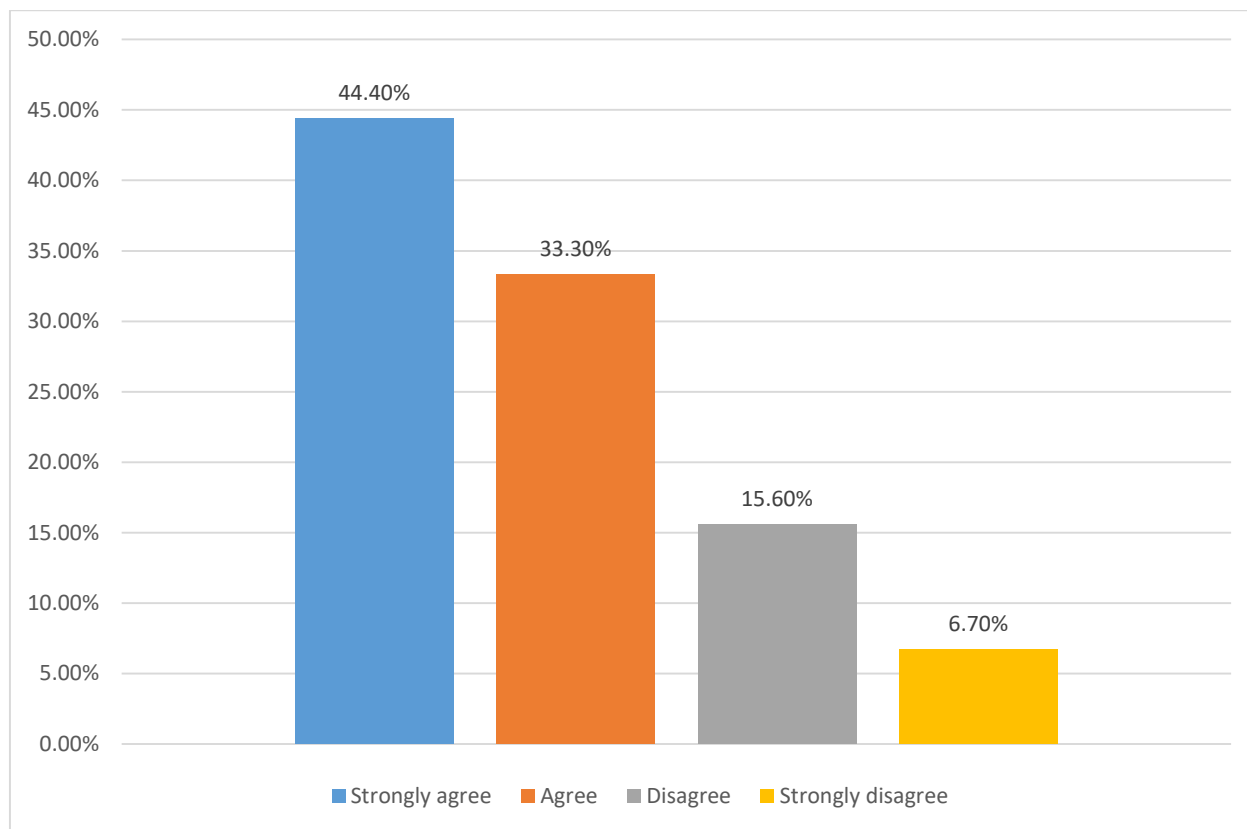


FIGURE 1: PERCEPTION OF NEGATIVE IMPACT ON CHILD'S HEALTH DUE TO MOTHERS DRINKING BEER

A total of 77.7% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that mothers who drink beer negatively impact their children's nutrition.

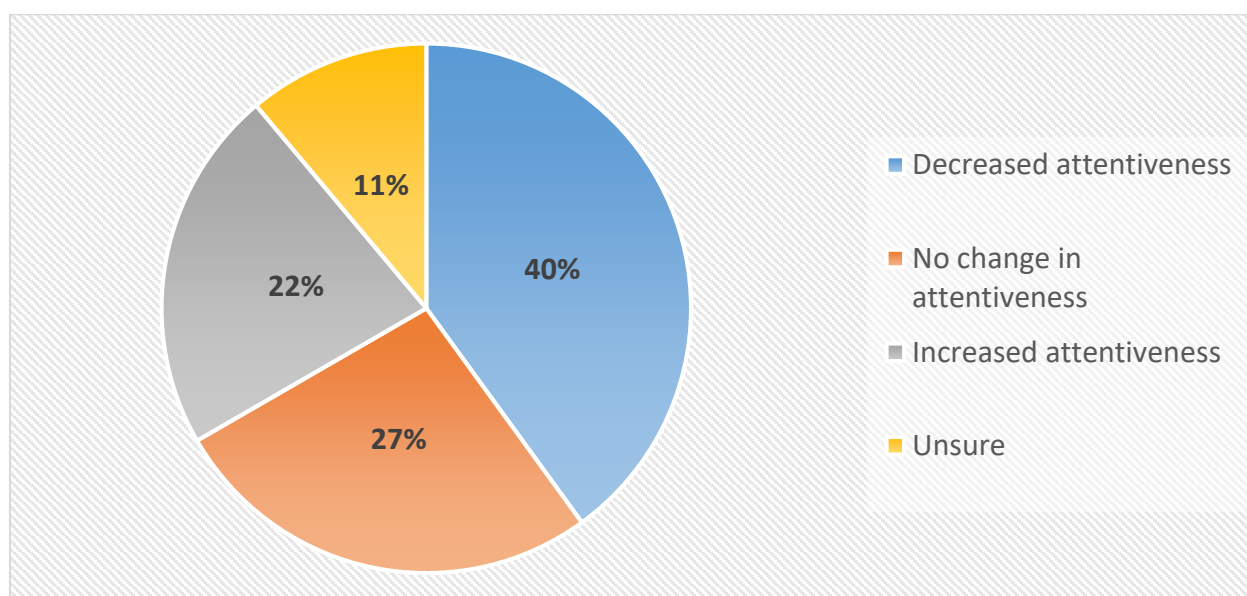


FIGURE 2: PERCEPTIONS ON MOTHERS' ATTENTIVENESS TO CHILD'S NUTRITION WHEN DRINKING BEER

Most respondents (40.0%) perceived that mothers who drink beer have decreased attentiveness to their children's nutrition while 26.7% perceived no change.

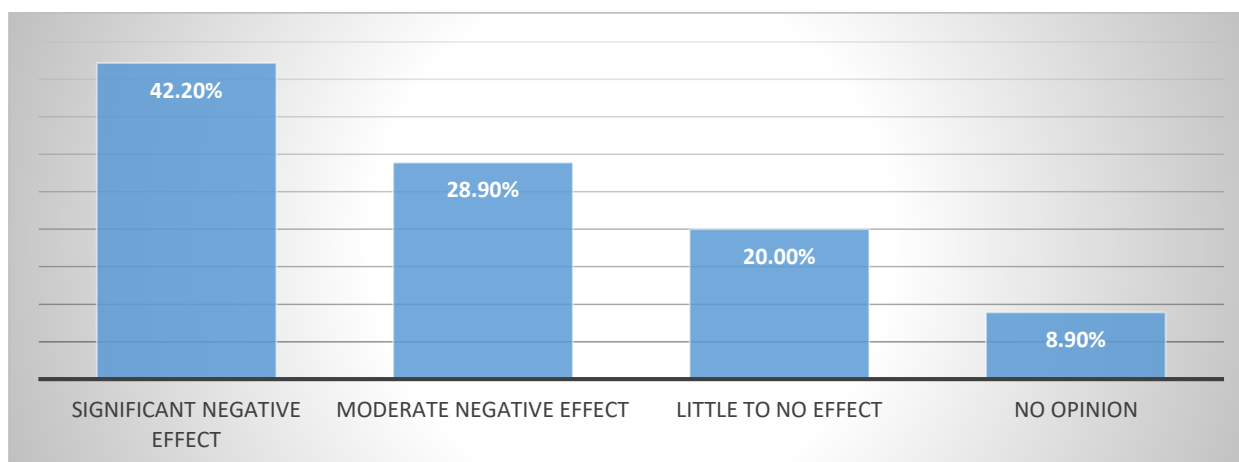


FIGURE 3: SOCIAL STIGMA'S EFFECT ON CHILD'S CARE DUE TO MOTHERS DRINKING BEER

A total of 71.1% of respondents perceived that social stigma due to mothers drinking beer significantly or moderately affects the care of the child.

TABLE 2: PERCEPTIONS ON THE MOTHERS' ABILITY TO PROVIDE BALANCED NUTRITION WHILE DRINKING BEER

Perception	Frequency (n=45)	Percentage (%)
Unable to provide balanced nutrition	22	48.90%
Somewhat able to provide balanced nutrition	13	28.90%
Able to provide balanced nutrition	7	15.60%
Unsure	3	6.70%
Total	45	100%

Nearly half of the respondents (48.9%) believed that mothers who drink beer are unable to provide balanced nutrition for their under- five children.

3.2 Emerging Qualitative Themes on the Perception on Mothers who Drink Beer in Relation to the Nutrition of their Under- Five Children

The following topics frequently emerged during interviews with respondents and formed the basis of emerging themes in the qualitative research study:

- Socio- economic challenge** Respondents observed that even working mothers who drink beer had problems in running the affairs of their homes. This view is also acknowledged by health scientists who say mothers who drink, especially binge drinking, contribute to 73% of the financial costs to society. Malcolm (2019) attributes these costs through lost productivity, accidents, injuries, health problems as well as violence.
- Poor management of children's needs** Respondents noted that mothers who drink beer and have children who go to school, are in most cases neglected in terms of preparation for their food to school. The mothers themselves are unavailable either because they did not return from the bar or are too tired to wake up and prepare for the child. Such children will be wearing dirty clothes and generally not well attended to in brushing teeth or combed hair.
- Mother's drinking habit affects the feeding of their under- five children**

From Mbondo and Guduza villages cases of mothers dumping children with neighbours were common. They pretended they were going to fetch water or fire wood. This led to children starving because some neighbours also refused to feed such children. Respondents said that some mothers did not have time to cook for their children because they were always

away from home to beer parties. They contended that even if these mothers returned home, which was either very late or not at all, they would not be in position to cook for the children for they would be too tired to do so. The children themselves would be sleeping by the time their mothers returned from the beer halls and bars. Respondent M from Mbondo Village had this to say

*Ngati udziwa kuti ulibe cocita, ndi cifukwa
Ciani kukhala na bana bambiri amene azakubvyutisa cabe?
Ndi cifukwa cake ife benangu sitifuna kuyamba vocita-cita
pakuti sibvikupatsa mtendere.
(If you know you cannot provide for many children, why
have a large number of children who will not give you peace?
That is the reason why some of us we don't want to go into
such activities).
(Mother M from Mbondo Village).*

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Discussions in this study were triggered by the questions that were framed for the respondents following the objectives of the study.

Figure 1: What are the perceptions that people have on mothers who drink beer in relation to the nutrition of their under-five children? The response from this question was that mothers who drink beer negatively impact their under-five children's nutrition, consequently their health is affected too. Studies have showed that children whose mothers consume alcohol are at high risk of a long range of health issues such as malnutrition, developmental delays including behavioral problems (May et al., 2009).

In figure 2 the mother's attention to a child's nutrition when she was drinking beer was raised. It was noted that 40.0% of the respondents perceived that mothers who drink beer have decreased attention to their children's nutrition. This lack of attention to children who are in their early age is what reinforces the need for targeted interventions to sensitise these mothers to be attentive to their children and be able to provide better nutrition for them (Popova et al 2017). Further revelations showed that drinking mothers failed to prepare heps (a high energy protein supplement) which need more time to prepare.

Table 2 shows perceptions on mother's ability to provide balanced nutrition while drinking beer. This response that drew 48.9 % is an indication that more mothers who drink beer are unable to provide balanced diet. Lack of balanced diet in the body brings malnutrition, a condition that is going to cause stunted growth in children.

Social stigma and isolation were identified as challenges by 55.6% of respondents. Mothers who drink beer often face judgment and ostracism from their communities, which can further hinder their ability to access support and resources. This stigma is consistent with existing research that highlights the negative social consequences of alcohol use, including social exclusion and reduced support from family and community (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). The stigma not only affects the mothers' social interactions but also their mental health and their ability to provide adequate care for their children (Room, 2005).

People's perceptions on mothers who drink beer indicated that these mothers did not have time to prepare food for their children. This scenario was prevalent not only to mothers who were workers but even those who did not have employment. In such cases those who prepare food for the under-five children are either maids or girls related to the family. It is not established how well-vested these persons are in providing child care anyway. This leaves a doubt whether a child is properly looked after or not. A concern from this pattern of habit is that if a mother drinks alcohol on regular basis, she will be aloof from preparation of her under-five children's food.

Mother's drinking habit has other complications on the children apart from nutritional reasons. Eysenck (2016) refers juvenile delinquency to behaviour by the people who are young that are outside the norms of society, either formally or

informally. Baker (2017) note that this behaviour is caused by emotional, psychological and cognitive challenges experienced in early years. Bandura (2021) in his Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggests that observation and modelling play a primary role in how children learn and why they behave the way they do. This under-pins the need for mothers to nurture their children in the norms of the society so that they are not social misfits in community.

Other challenges perceived on mothers who drink beer is orchestrating gender- based violence. Violent fights come up in homes or elsewhere when a woman would talk to a male folk in a way a male perceived was being challenged.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the issue of maternal alcohol consumption and its perceived impact on the nutrition of under-five children is a critical yet often overlooked factor in addressing child malnutrition in rural areas like Chongwe District. Understanding community perceptions provides valuable insights into the social dynamics that influence maternal behaviors and, ultimately, child health outcomes. By exploring these perceptions, this study aims to highlight the need for culturally appropriate interventions that not only address nutritional deficiencies but also target the underlying behavioral and social factors contributing to poor child nutrition. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, health practitioners, and community leaders in developing strategies that promote positive maternal practices, strengthen community support systems, and improve the overall nutritional status of young children. Ultimately, addressing both behavioral and societal influences is essential for achieving sustainable improvements in child health and development outcomes in Zambia.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Implement Community-Based Awareness Campaigns:

- Health authorities and community leaders should organize culturally sensitive education programs to raise awareness about the effects of maternal alcohol consumption on child nutrition and development.

2. Strengthen Maternal and Child Health Support Services:

- The government and non-governmental organizations should enhance the availability of maternal and child health services in rural areas, including nutrition counseling, alcohol abuse prevention programs, and targeted support for mothers identified as at-risk.

3. Support Women's Economic Empowerment and Social Support Initiatives:

- The government and non-governmental organizations should implement programs that provide mothers with alternative sources of income, vocational skills training, and access to microfinance can help reduce financial hardships that may contribute to alcohol consumption.

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