FISH AND FISH PRODUCTS CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES OF FARMERS IN WESTERN KENYA

Fish and fish products contain high-quality protein of animal origin with essential bioavailable micronutrients such as iron, zinc, vitamins and omega-3 fatty acids. Although fish contribute to food and nutrition security, fish consumption per capita in Kenya is lower than Africa's and the world's average annual per capita consumptions. This study assessed fish farmers' attitudes and consumption behaviours for fish and value-added fish products in three Counties in Western Kenya. A cross-sectional study involving a mixed-method approach applying qualitative and quantitative techniques was used to collect data from one hundred and thirty-eight women with children aged 6 to 59 months. Participants were selected from a random sample of registered fish farmer groups representing vulnerable, marginalized and common interest groups within the study areas. Overall, most households consume fish as their main source of protein with the Nile tilapia being the most preferred fish species. A majority (64%) of the farmers had positive attitudes towards fish consumption and were interested in incorporating value-added fish products into their daily diets. In addition, availability of value-added fish products, knowledge of the existence of these products, skills in preparation and cooking, and socio-economic factors influenced consumption. The farmer's age ([Adjusted odds ratio, AOR = 2.83], [95% Cl: 1.23-6.52], p = 0.014), marital status ([AOR = 7.31], [95% Cl: 1.51-35.4], p = 0.014), monthly income ([AOR = 1.33], [95% Cl: 0.13-0.83], p = 0.019) and occupation of the household head ([AOR = 5.06, [95% Cl: 2.06-12.4], p<0.001) were positively associated with consumption of value-added fish products. However, education level ([AOR = 1.84, [95% Cl: 0.17-20.0], p = 0.617) was not associated with consumption of value-added fish products. Fish consumption patterns such as frequency and portion sizes significantly improved in the fish farmer households after they began fish farming. Furthermore, few farmers consumed value-added fish products due to low availability, lack of awareness and inadequate skills for preparation and cooking. In conclusion, awareness creation campaigns on fish value addition, nutrition education and behaviour change communication aimed at modifying nutrition behaviours are necessary to increase fish consumption, improve knowledge and skills, and ensure the availability of value-added fish products during all seasons.