Factors Associated with Food Insecurity Among Female Savings Group Participants in Burkina Faso
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Background

In Burkina Faso, one of the poorest countries in Africa, 44.6% of individuals live on less than $1.25 per day. Over recent years, climate-related hazards have been detrimental to the health of the population in the northcentral regions of the country. These changes have led to decreasing food availability in areas already plagued with low food consumption levels and severe malnutrition, especially in preharvest periods. Negative health effects of food insecurity are manifest as hindered child development, weight and sleep loss, and other social and psychological consequences. Common measures of food security include food availability, access, and utilization measured at the individual or household level. Potential variables influencing food security are women’s land ownership and ability to negotiate or influence decision making in their household. Freedom from Hunger, a non-profit organization aimed at combating poverty and chronic hunger in developing countries, uses sustainable self-help programs, e.g., Savings for Change, to combat food insecurity in Burkina Faso.

Methods

Study Design: This is a baseline data analysis of the Savings for Change program from Freedom From Hunger implemented by the Office de Développement des Églises Évangéliques in Burkina Faso.

Data Collection: 429 Women in local savings groups in Burkina Faso were recruited for participation in face-to-face interviews.

Participant Characteristics: Most households were polygamous (62.5%), while 27.7% were monogamous. The mean number of children was 4.33 (range 0 to 12). The average household size was 13.3 (range 3 to 46). Approximately 83% of households relied on petty commerce as a source of income, while 14.7% relied on selling cereals and grains. Women were an average of 40.3 years old (range 15 to 72 years). The majority of women had never attended school (84.4%) and most were not literate (80.2%). Almost none of the women personally owned land, and only 27.7% felt they had more influence over finances than their husband. A majority of women (72%) believed growing crops was for the sole purpose of feeding their family. Only 14.7% of women surveyed had personally used an agricultural loan to invest in crops.

Results

Household Food Insecurity & Related Conditions: 74% of women reported being food insecure. 1/3 of households reported not being able to meet their financial obligations in the past month. The mean number of meals consumed per day in a good month was 2.73. 41.5% of women reported not being able to produce enough food for home consumption, and over half of households were only somewhat confident or not confident in their ability to provide clean water. Most women reported they had learned new knowledge from their savings group members regarding both agricultural practices (84.4%) and nutrition (74.8%).

Agricultural Factors Associated with Food Insecurity in Women: Variables increasing the odds of food insecurity included learning new knowledge from members of savings group about productive agricultural practices (OR 2.892), using savings for agricultural input (OR 4.137), and not changing ideas and information about agricultural activities with savings groups members (OR 8.792) Variables that decreased the odds of food insecurity included having greater dietary diversity (OR 0.581) and having a higher agricultural technique score, thus utilizing a greater number of agricultural techniques (OR 0.434).

Financial Factors Associated with Food Insecurity in Women: Financial variables increasing the odds of food insecurity included feeling somewhat capable of meeting financial obligations in the past month (OR 2.252), not owning land (OR 3.831) and not growing and selling a cash crop (OR 13.583). Husbands having more financial influence compared to equal (OR 3.047) or less (OR 12.480) influence than their wives increased the odds of food insecurity as did a lack of household income resiliency (OR 4.336).

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Conclusions

This study suggests that food insecurity is widespread among women in Northern and Central West Burkina Faso. In Burkina Faso, women’s roles are evolving to take on greater responsibility over food security, especially during the hungry season. Knowledge of evolving cultural roles combined with these findings may be beneficial for both national officials and non-government organizations to understand as programs should address determinants of food security to improve food security and associated health outcomes.