

## ABSTRACT

Optimal foetal development is the foundation for good healthy early years of life. Despite strong evidence that beneficial effects of improved foetal development, the care practices that are relevant to foster optimum foetal and newborn development seems to be inadequate. This study was aimed to assess the knowledge and practices of postnatal mothers on fetal growth and development, and their association with some selected pregnancy related outcomes, at Base Hospital Diyathalawa.

The study was conducted at the post natal ward of the Base Hospital Diyathalawa, from July to August 2008. For this descriptive cross-sectional study, data was collected from post natal mothers within 24 hours of delivery, regarding the knowledge and practices on foetal development during pre pregnant, pregnant and post natal periods. The data was collected from 392 postnatal mothers using an interviewer administered questionnaire. Frequency distributions, summary statistics and cross-tabulations were made using SPSS 15.0. Statistical significance was measured using chi-square test.

The results revealed that mothers had a poor knowledge on factors affecting foetal development during the pre conception period. Except for the rubella coverage (86%) pre pregnant care provided by the health sector was inadequate. During the time of pregnancy, mothers had a fair knowledge on factors affecting foetal development. But majority of them had not translated this knowledge into practices. Psychosocial support from the family members for the mothers was found to be satisfactory while passive exposure to smoking was a concern. Majority of the mothers (75%) were aware of the low birth weight but only 61% knew adverse effects of it. Initiation of breast feeding within one hour of delivery was at a high level (94.2%), and most of the mothers (93%) managed to give the 'colostrum' to their newborn. Mothers' practices for the enhancement of the bond between mother and baby were found to be at a high level.

Almost 31% of newborns in the sample were low birth weight, and the proportion of mothers who had not gained at least 7 kg during pregnancy was also around 31%. Certain practices adopted by mothers for foetal development during pregnancy were significantly

associated with the maternal weight gain during pregnancy but not with the birth weight of babies.

Majority of the mothers had been educated on ECCD by PHMM (79.6%), while the involvement of doctors and other health care personal for education on ECCD was minimal. Usage of electronic and print media for gathering knowledge on ECCD was negligible. Only 25.3% and 27.6% of mothers had read posters and booklets on ECCD respectively.

In conclusion it is evident that health care services, as well as mother's knowledge and practices regarding pre-pregnant care were inadequate. The practices adopted by mother and family on foetal development during pregnancy is an area that needs greater improvement. Mothers were confident about breastfeeding, but they have to be encouraged on building bond with their baby further more. Deficiencies highlighted in this study may be useful for Health planners and programme managers to plan programs for the pre-pregnant, pregnant, and postnatal women.