

## ABSTRACT

**Objective** The study was carried out to determine the service gap between the perceived and expected service quality in neonatal care among mothers delivered in Teaching Hospital Mahamodera, Galle, and to identify factors influencing this service gap.

**Methods** A cross-sectional study involving 385 mothers, who had delivered their babies in three obstetrics units of the Teaching Hospital Mahamodera, was carried out. A convenient sampling method was used to select the required number of samples. Service gap was measured by using a multiple item scale called SERVQUAL which includes eighteen pairs of items (clauses). Five elements of the WHO responsiveness model were used as service dimensions. **Gap (SERVQUAL) score** was calculated by subtracting the **expectation score from perception score (P-E)**.

**Results** Most of the mothers (34.5%) included in the sample were in the age group of 26-30 years. 40.5% of the mothers were in their second pregnancy. Out of the five dimensions used prompt attention had the largest negative score (-1.67) suggesting that mothers perceptions were less than their expectations. Dignity dimension had the smallest negative score (-0.09) though negative, the very small gap suggests that mothers had perceived what they expect at least to a certain extent. The overall weighted SERVQUAL score was -7.11 indicating that mothers did not perceive the service they expected overall. While analyzing all five dimensions with some selected

factors it was found that there is a significant association between the gap score and the level of education ( $P=0.04$ ) and the duration of stay ( $P=0.006$ ). But age ( $P=0.64$ ), level of social class ( $P=0.08$ ) and the parity ( $P=0.27$ ) had no significant association with the gap scores.

**Conclusions** Out of the five dimensions studied, dignity is the dimension, mothers had perceived the service expected at least to a certain extent (Mean gap score - 0.09). On the other hand, prompt attention is the dimension mothers expected most but did not perceive as received (Mean gap score -1.67). As the level of education advanced gap scores became higher (more negative) reflecting that with the increase of the level of education expectations are high ( $P=0.04$ ). The same significant effect was seen with the duration of stay in the hospital ( $p=0.006$ ). Except for the level of social class and the parity of the mother three other factors namely, Age, Level of education and the duration of stay had significant associations with the different dimensions when taken individually. The overall conclusion is that mother's perceptions of services are not up to their expectations and therefore the overall service quality is low as expressed by a negative gap score (-7.11) between perceptions and expectations.