

ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to assess the level of oral health knowledge and level of oral health care practices of Public Health Midwives (PHMM) in Puttalam district, in relation to selected socio demographic, socio-economic and known contributory factors.

The study design was a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The survey was carried out in the months of August and September in 2006. Study population was the total number of PHMM, employed in Puttalam district. Out of 156 PHMM employed, 139 participated in the study. Oral health care practices of PHMM were further evaluated by interviewing a sample of 225 mothers under the care of PHMM, representing all 09 Medical Officer of Health (MOH) areas in Puttalam district.

A self administered questionnaire was used to collect data from PHMM. An interviewer administered questionnaire was used for the mothers.

No sampling technique was used for the selection of PHMM, as all PHMM employed in Puttalam district during the study period was considered as eligible, to participate in the study. A non-probability convenient sampling method was used to select the sample of mothers, as the investigator was pressed for time and resources.

Participation of the PHMM was 89% and, can be considered as a good representation of PHMM working in Puttalam district. PHMM in Puttalam district were Sinhala (except for only one Tamil participant). The majority belonged to the age group of 30-40 years. Most of the PHMM were married and had children. Location of

residence was close by to the place of work, of the majority of the PHMM. They were fairly well educated, but lacked motivation.

In service trainings the PHMM have received were mostly related to the areas of Maternal and Child Health (MCH) care. In service training on oral health was received by nearly 45% (n=62) of the PHMM.

They were questioned on the topics of oral health related to Maternal & general, Infant & child and Available oral health services. When overall knowledge scores were considered, it was found that, the oral health knowledge of PHMM in Puttalam district was poor. For all the components of oral health knowledge tested (general, maternal, infant/child and available services), the obtained marks were below 50%.

Significant associations were observed between the level of education (P=0.047), duration of service (P=0.037) and, oral health knowledge related to Infants and children. Association between the exposure to in-service training on oral health, and the level of oral health knowledge was, some what surprising. Level of oral health knowledge was significantly poor among the PHMM who have received oral health in-service training (P=0.042).

Level of oral health care practices increased significantly with the age (P=0.034) and parity (P=0.057) of the PHMM. Level of education had a significantly “inverse” association with the level of oral health care practices (P=0.050), as mean practice score was lower among the PHMM who were educated up to General Certificate in Education (Advanced Level) (G.C.E. A/L) than the PHMM who had General certificate in education (Ordinary Level) (G.C.E. O/L) qualification.

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Oral health knowledge of the mothers who were under the care of PHMM was also questioned, on the categories of Maternal, Child and Available services. It was found that, the oral health knowledge of mothers was very poor. When the mothers were asked if they have been provided with oral health care services by PHMM, majority of the mothers stated that, they have not been assisted with their oral health problems or not been provided with oral health knowledge by PHMM.

Key words: Public Health Midwife, Primary health care worker, Knowledge, Practices, Oral health, Care