

## ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to plan, develop, implement and to assess the outcome of a Distance Education programme for a group of identified Public Health Midwives (PHMM) in 'post partum care of the mother' and on 'care of the newborn' in the field using an experimental study design.

The study was carried out on Public Health Midwives working in the Divisional Director of Health Services (DDHS) areas of Kalutara and Galle Districts of Sri Lanka. The study population consisted of 519 Public Health Midwives attached to DDHS areas of the two districts who fulfilled the eligibility criteria specified before the study. Randomization of PHMM into study and control groups were achieved by randomization of DDHS areas.

The baseline levels of knowledge, attitudes and performances of the PHMM of study and control groups on study topics, were assessed before the intervention. A Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ) and a Short Answer Questions (SAQ) paper were used to assess the knowledge. Attitudes were assessed by using a questionnaire. In assessment of performance of the PHMM a non participatory observation of a sub sample of PHMM using a check list was used. The basic socio-demographic and service information of the two groups were collected by a self administered questionnaire.

Distance Education programme was implemented among the PHMM of the DDHS areas randomized into the study group. This consisted of self learning modules on 'post partum care of the mother' and 'care of the newborn' in the field and three tutorials were distributed monthly while the control group were not exposed to the DE programme.

The post intervention assessment was carried out using the same instruments and the same procedure used for the pre intervention assessment. It was conducted six weeks after the completion of the Distance Education programme.

The results showed that the total knowledge scores of the study group has increased at a level which is statistically significant from  $44.9 \pm 7.3$  to  $62.0 \pm 10.1$  at the post intervention assessment ( $P < 0.001$ ), in comparison to the control group which has improved from  $44.9 \pm 7.7$  to  $46.6 \pm 11.0$  during the same period ( $P > 0.05$ ). However, the attitude scores of the study and control groups have only shown a slight improvement from  $64.6 \pm 20.8$  to  $66.7 \pm 18.2$  and  $68.1 \pm 19.2$  to  $71.3 \pm 16.4$  respectively. The difference of the attitude scores of the two groups obtained at the pre and post intervention assessments were not statistically significant ( $P > 0.05$ ).

The performance score of the two groups showed that the performance of PHMM of the study group has improved only in certain areas where as the pre intervention assessment scores were lower. This was not seen in the control group.

The Distance Education approach was effective in improving the knowledge of the PHMM. Although it was not found to be successful in improving attitudes, it was effective in improving the performance of PHMM in selected areas.

Planning, development and implementation of a Distance Education programme is feasible specially in the context of the availability of personnel and organizational structure of Divisional Directors of Health Services areas.