
Infant feeding behaviors in Nuwaragam-Palatha-Central (NPC) Medical Officer of Health (MOH) area; a qualitative study.

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Background

Although Sri Lanka has achieved exemplary progress in many maternal and child health services, indicators related to childhood nutrition have been disappointing and stagnating for the past few decades. Locally prevalent behavioral factors may play an important role in determining child nutrition.

Objective

To explore the infant and youngchild feeding behaviors of mothers in NPC- MOH area.

Methods

We used a qualitative approach using two key informant interviews with public health midwives and six focus group discussions (FGDs) with mothers of children less than 2 years of age to identify the locally prevalent food practices, behaviours, belief and myths. Participants for these FGDs were selected from child welfare clinics. Around 8-12 participants were selected for each FGDs and Family Health International guidelines were be followed in conducting the discussions. Interviews were tape recorded; transcribed and thematic analysis was performed.

Results

Optimal and suboptimal behavioural factors were identified in mothers having children with normal and inadequate weight gain respectively. Mothers having children with normal growth were appropriately informed by the service providers to practice infant feeding guidelines given by the national child health programme. Suboptimal behaviours identified among the group of mothers who had children with inadequate weight gain were mainly related to; exclusive breast feeding, selection and preparation of complementary foods, complimentary feeding patterns and adaptation to adult foods. Healthcare providers and mothers of small children had different views and perceptions on causes for growth problems. Service providers were not having an in-depth understanding of sub optimal practices in this community.

Discussion

Identification of locally prevalent behavioural factors should be used in local programme planning for infant feeding. Qualitative techniques are useful for in-depth exploration of these behaviours.