

Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Caregivers at Mihintale

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Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) comprises all the essential support a young child needs to survive and thrive in life, as well as the support a family and community need to give to promote children's healthy development. This includes integrating health, nutrition and intellectual stimulation, providing the opportunities for exploration and active learning, as well as providing social and emotional care. Nurturing children's needs in order to realize their human potential to play an active role in their families and later in their communities is also important. Early Childhood Care and Development program has been introduced in Sri Lanka to address these issues. A key component of this program involves further training for Public Health Midwives (PHMs) on how to stimulate caregivers about caring for their child's psychosocial development.

The research was conducted at Nuwara wewa GN Division of the Henewatte PHM area which is located in the Mihintale MOH division during the end of April 2007. The study was carried out as a pre evaluation using structured questionnaires with 50 caregivers especially mothers of children below 12 years of age about their knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to the ECCD. The basic needs of the children which were identified as a normative need, the way they perceive the ECCD, learning methods of children, commercial influences such as instant foods, alcohol and tobacco, gender based violence and child abuse were some of the topics addressed in the questionnaires.

When evaluating the questionnaires the average marks obtained by the caregivers who had an education below the G.C.E. Ordinary Level was 15.87 %. Caregivers who had completed their Ordinary Levels had an average of 20.16 % and those who had an education level of G.C.E. Advanced level or above had an average of 24.34%. It was found that there was a direct relationship between the level of education of the caregiver and the knowledge and attitude about ECCD. Caregivers primarily associated the term ECCD with proper growth and nutrition, but the psychological development of the children was less understood. They relied mostly on the PHM for support regarding ECCD. The value of ECCD has to be understood more deeply by the parents in order to provide a supportive environment for their children for better growth and development.