

Food belief practices amongst mothers in Nepal: A qualitative overview

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Background: Mothers in Nepal misunderstand the role of healthy eating to combat nutritional problems leading to improper feeding of young children which can lead to several complications, particularly in preschool-aged children.

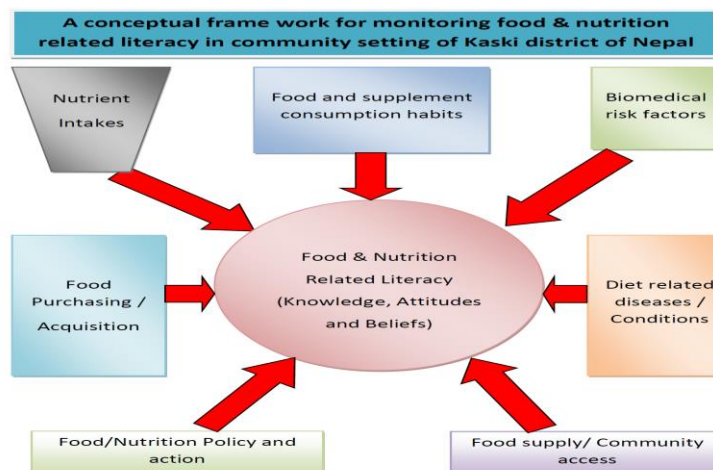
Research Questions: What are the maternal views about healthy food? What is the mothers' food and health seeking behaviours towards preschool aged children? What are the major factors that affect food recommendations?

Methods: A qualitative research comprising seven focus groups of 50 participants in total. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed, translated and the data were analysed using a thematic analysis.

Results: we identified six key themes related to food beliefs: poverty, knowledge, resources, policy, environmental effects, beliefs and cultural influences. All FGDs thought that poor, illiterate and underserved populations are vulnerable and due to poverty, poor knowledge and strongly embedded cultural beliefs & taboos. This study found '*diversified views*' as a major barrier to food recommendation.

Result I:.... health institutions are ultimately costly for poor people and worthless mainly in Bhut, Prait and Pichas (spiritual conditions). Thus, people are knocking on our doors because all the mothers care about their children and want to escape from the problems as soon as possible. We are honest, kind and more familiar with the community and we have distinct knowledge on the matter.

(FGD: Spiritual Healer)



Result II: nowadays most of the mothers just stop breastfeeding even earlier than six months. It may be due to the condition of the mothers and several existing misconceptions or rumours about breastfeeding and colostrum. These rumours really are discouraging to us. Colostrum is regarded as a form of pus, toxic, and a harmful substance by society. These rumours are strongly embedded in every mother's mind in this society. It is being promoted generally by senior women of the community and Hindu texts.

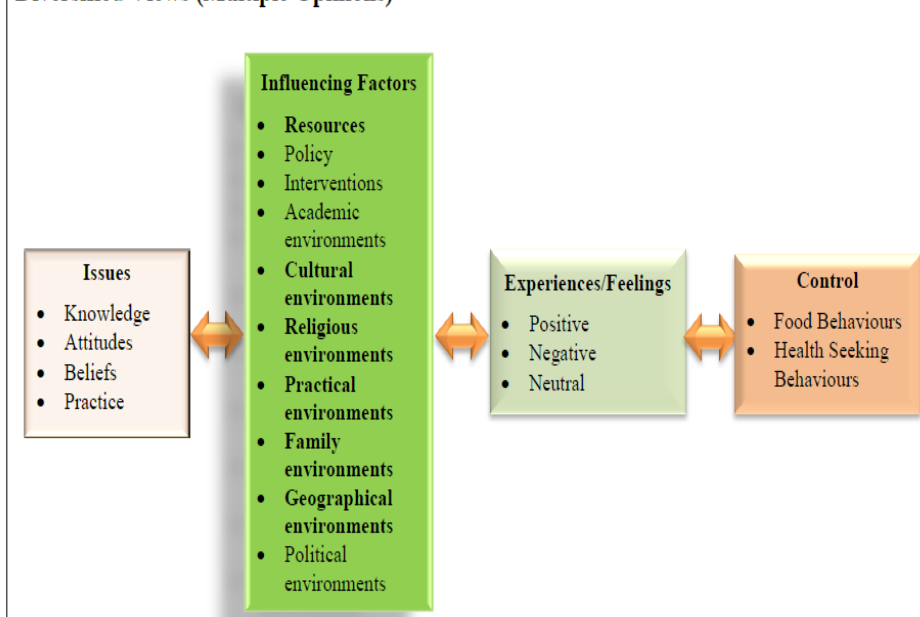
(FGD: ANM).

Adopted from: Marks et al 2001

Result III: cultural issues have a strong impact on people's food behaviour. Food habits and practices are closely associated with the typical food behaviours of particular groups of people or cultures which follow codes of conduct in relation to food choice, cooking methods and eating and including frequency of meals, time (of meals) and portion size. (FGD: Policy People).

Result IV: ... many families, around my working area, believed that feeding of pregnant women a lot of food will make delivery difficult, so they even reduce the amount of food once they notice the pregnancy. Thus, I have observed that many pregnant women are being prevented from (eating) healthy food. (FGD: Mothers' Group).

Diversified Views (Multiple Opinions)



Conclusions: Mothers views appear to be poorly-informed. Both rural and urban women had high faith in spiritual healers. A public health approach is needed to address nutrition problems associated with behaviour. Food behaviour and culture are strongly associated in Nepal, people follow the codes of conduct in relation to food consumption, food preparation methods and eating habits, select of food, the meals taken daily, time and portion of meal eaten and size.

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