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Towards safe motherhood in Sri Lanka: Knowledge, attitudes and practices during the period of maternity

Dr. W. I. De Silva

Introduction

The knowledge road to health has many pitfalls and women in less developed countries and particularly those who are poor, illiterate and unemployed, face crucial trade-offs when they attempt to fulfill their biological, social and other needs. However, maternal health has been recognised in almost all developing countries to be of great importance since the satisfaction of the basic needs of children at every phase of their life is closely linked to the well-being of the mother; the dependence being greatest during pregnancy, and continuous during infancy¹. Therefore, a variety of communication channels such as the newspaper, radio, television and health personnel in developing countries are devoted to improving the mother's knowledge, attitudes and practice of maternal health. However, many mothers still experience conflicts putting new knowledge into action due to the practical and external difficulties prevailing in each area, such as inadequacy of facilities and illiteracy.

In less developed areas, success in over-

coming the barriers of attitudes, knowledge and practice depends largely on improvements in the quality of the existing health care system. In this context, the primary health care approach recommended by the Alma Ata conference is seen as a means for less developed countries to bring 'health without wealth' to the people². Thus, during the last decade, many developing countries have been able to put new knowledge into action among vulnerable groups by improving education and health services, and employing community health workers and other organisations. Since maternal health and, to a great extent, the health status of the new-born depend on the mother's knowledge, attitudes and practice of various health measures during the period of maternity, the present study was formulated to examine some aspects of awareness, attitudes and practices among women in Sri Lanka during pregnancy, childbirth and post delivery.

Sample and methodology

The study was undertaken in six Public

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