



QUALITATIVE STUDY ON PERCEPTION OF MOTHERS REGARDING DIETARY PRACTICES DURING THE POSTPARTUM PERIOD

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Women with a history of gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) have a significant risk of developing type two diabetes mellitus (T2DM) in later life. Dietary interventions after delivery are known to attenuate the trajectory to T2DM. The aim of this study was to explore the perception of mothers on traditions, myths and barriers regarding healthy dietary practices during the postpartum period.

Thirty volunteering antenatal mothers with a diagnosis of GDM who also have a past history of GDM were invited for this study. Focus group discussions were used to collect data. Ten mothers were invited to form one focus group and 3 such groups were taken from 3 selected districts, Colombo, Gampaha and Galle. Focus group discussions were conducted with each group till the saturation point was achieved. Discussions were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were independently reviewed by the researchers and themes were identified and coded using a content analysis approach.

Five key themes emerged from the data (1) Myths and traditions of food and food habits specific to postpartum period, (2) lack of motivation to practice (3) Time pressure, (4) negligence and (5) financial barriers. In addition, lack of awareness, social pressure and lack of family support were identified as important barriers especially among women residing in rural areas.

This study provides an insight into the traditions, myths and barriers regarding dietary practices of GDM mothers. Postpartum period has unique problems. Therefore, identifying these is important in planning dietary interventions for these mothers in order to prevent or reduce the future risk of developing diabetes mellitus.

The dietary interventions planned should be culturally acceptable. Dietary counseling and motivation should be targeted not only for mothers but for their family members to improve adherence to management plans designed for these women.

Keywords: *Gestational diabetes mellitus, Qualitative study, Dietary interventions, Focus group discussion, Myths and barriers.*