

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

BARRIERS, STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS OF PRE-PREGNANCY CLINIC SERVICES IN SARAWAK: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS FROM PROVIDER PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Pre-pregnancy Clinic (PPC) services is one the plausible efforts towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. However, various issues still need to be addressed for improvement of the services. Considering this view, an attempt was made to explore the barriers, strength and weakness of current practice of pre-pregnancy clinic services in Sarawak, since the programme has been implemented in this state from the year 2011. This cross-sectional study was conducted at nine selected health care facilities throughout Sarawak. A multistage sampling procedure was adapted to select the health care facilities. An unstructured open-ended questionnaire was administered to get the in-depth perceived views and current practice of pre-pregnancy clinic services. A total of 322 health care providers from nine selected health care facilities gave their feedback. In the present paper, a qualitative analysis was done for the open-ended questions to get in-depth views of barriers, strength and weakness of pre-pregnancy clinic services. The results of the study were narrated in textual form and a thematic analysis was done manually. The identified themes for perceived barriers to the provision of pre-pregnancy care were perception, attitude and acceptance of PPC services, socio-economic issues, services and client factors. The perceived weaknesses of the services are listed under two main themes: working environment and service factors, while, the strength of services produced three thematic areas which are preparation for pregnancy, prevention of mortality and morbidity and comprehensive services. Though pre-pregnancy services are beneficial for society wellbeing, various issues still need to be considered for the improvement of the quality of services. Lack of awareness, no ministerial guidelines or Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and knowledge pertaining to the services were few of the main areas which need to be pondered upon. Promotional activities and campaigns should be geared up ensuring availability the services to the general population.

Keywords: Barriers, Perception, Pre-pregnancy Care, Sarawak

INTRODUCTION

Pre-conception care can be defined as “interventions that optimize women’s health before pregnancy with the intent to improve maternal and new born health outcomes” or “a set of interventions that aim to identify and modify biomedical, behavioural, and social risks to a woman’s health or pregnancy outcome through prevention and management”¹. Hence, it is aimed at identifying and modifying biomedical, behavioural, and social risks through preventive and management interventions². The main purpose of implementing the pre-pregnancy clinic is to prevent pregnancies which are unplanned, too early or too close³.

In Malaysia, pre-pregnancy care services were first introduced in the year 2002. It was then expanded to Sarawak in the year 2011, whereby primary health care is the main providers of the service. Provision of pregnancy care services in Malaysia is based on the Perinatal Care Manual, which was published by the Division of Family Health Development under Ministry of Health, Malaysia in 2013⁴. The target groups for the services were, a) prospective couples intending

to get married, b) women who are married, planning a pregnancy, c) women in reproductive age group (15-44 years of age) and more specifically, it was designed to serve the a) women above 35 years old without medical illness, planning a pregnancy, b) clients with obesity, c) clients with medical illnesses) clients with previous miscarriages/stillbirths/early neonatal death, e) clients with inherited abnormalities, f) clients with babies who have inherited abnormalities, g) clients with congenital structural abnormalities, h) clients with babies with congenital structural abnormalities, and i) clients with family history of genetic disorders. The whole service to be given both in outpatient department and in hospital level especially through specialty clinic.

The major activities during pre-pregnancy visits are: a) screening for risk factors (history taking, physical examination and clinical laboratory tests), b) Identification of pre-pregnancy risk factors, c) right management according to identified risk factors and d) referral to pre-pregnancy care clinic⁴ However, the rate of utilisation and knowledge pertaining to pre-pregnancy care among women in Malaysia remains