

A Qualitative Study on Malnutrition in Children from the Perspectives of Health Workers in Tumpat, Kelantan

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ABSTRACT

Underlying causes of most nutrition related problems are diverse, including biological, social, cultural, and economic factors. Qualitative approaches complement quantitative methods in identifying the underlying meanings and patterns of relationships involved in managing malnutrition. This study examined perceptions regarding malnutrition among health workers from 7 clinics (community and health clinics) in Tumpat, Kelantan. A total of 18 nurses and 2 doctors, who were involved in monitoring child health and nutrition, were included in the study. These health workers were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire adapted from Sastry's framework on malnutrition (Sastry, 1996). The questionnaire included biological, behavioral and environmental factors that influence child health and nutrition. All the health workers perceived that mothers/caregivers play the main role in improving the health of malnourished children. The quality of childcare was rated as moderately satisfactory by the health workers. Most of the affected families who were given the Food Baskets did not fully use all the items for the malnourished child. Child feeding practice was based on the needs of the whole family rather than according to the target child's needs. Most of the mothers preferred processed cereals than rice porridge because the former is easier to prepare for the child. Although they were from a low socio-economic background, most of the mothers were not earning additional income for the family. The qualitative methodology provided information that can be used as a basis for the designing of quantitative questionnaires to assess malnutrition among children. The induction characteristic of qualitative methods was used to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons or phenomena such as behaviours that are directly observable.