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Factors Affecting Father's Involvement in Infants' Care: A Qualitative Study in Matara District, Sri Lanka

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Background: Father's involvement in infants' care is associated with positive physical and psychological development in a child. In order to improve father's role in infants' care, the factors that influence his involvement are important to be known.

Objective: To explore the factors influencing father's involvement in infant care in a capital city of Southern Sri Lanka.

Methodology: As a part of a series of phenomenological studies exploring parental competencies, five Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted including six fathers of infants at early infancy aged up to six months in each FGD. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling at the five Maternal and Child Health Clinics (MCH) in Matara District. Fathers' experience and perceptions on infant caring were explored using a pre-tested FGD guide. Data were analyzed using the framework approach for qualitative data analysis.

Results: Five major themes emerged from the analysis as influencing the father's involvement in infant care, i.e. fathers' involvement in infant care appeared to be the strongest while, cultural factors and economic status also resulted in poor fathers' involvement. Sparse consideration on father involvement in infant caring by the family health services also emerged as an influencing factor.

Conclusions: Healthy relationship between mother and father emerged as a primary factor facilitating father's involvement in infant care while grandparents' involvement negatively influenced his role. Antenatal and postnatal services must focus on building up a healthy relationship between father and the mother by emphasizing the importance of shared responsibility on the infants.

Keywords: *Father Involvement, Infant caring, Qualitative*

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