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Gaining insight into maternal and child health care in Lao PDR

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Abstract

Background: Improving quality of ANC contributes to better health for mother and child. Increased maternal health literacy (MHL) has also contributed considerably to maternal and child health outcomes. Optimal numbers of ANC visits help to improve health outcomes and decrease perinatal mortality. The aim of the thesis was to gain insight into maternal and child health care in urban and rural public health facilities in Lao PDR.

Methodology: A mixed-methods and iterative approach was used. A qualitative method helped to gain insight into the demand and supply sides views on ANC quality, then two observational studies provided detailed data on actual ANC performance. A quantitative cross-sectional survey measured maternal health literacy, and semi-structured interviews revealed determinants of positive deviant practices in ANC utilization. Three points of view provided contextualized data.

Findings: ANC utilization has increased, but ANC quality that needs to be improved, in the areas of facilities, human resources, privacy and confidentiality, providers' behavior, and attitudes. Both sides also suggested solutions, such as training, more effective materials, rewarding good role models, and building a feedback system. Overall, maternal health literacy (MHL) of Lao mothers was very low in both urban and rural areas. Socio-demographics and key practices of the mothers were significantly associated with a better level of MHL. Factors influencing optimal ANC visits are related to perception about the clear benefits of ANC particularly husbands, played a key role in making decisions to use ANC once they were aware of its benefits. The quality of ANC and incentives such as information booklets, soap, and mosquito nets, influenced women to use ANC. Friends and neighbors were an important source of information for mothers.

Conclusions: The quality of ANC provision remains inadequate in both urban and rural areas. Maternal health literacy was low in both urban and rural areas, influenced by socio-demographic characteristics and key practices. Factors influencing ANC utilization included clients' satisfaction, positive perception of mothers, family supports, the assistance of friends and neighbors. Most aspects of ANC quality require improvement. All of these results including future research results will be made available to inform future policy development.

Keywords: maternal and child health care, Lao PDR