

The Utilization of Postpartum Care among Thai Rural Mothers: Perspectives from the Prenatal to the Postpartum Period

Abstract

The evidence of a huge gap between the prenatal and delivery care usage and the postpartum care usage is apparent in many developing countries. For rural Thailand, this fact is asserted by our findings from the in-depth interviews conducted with 43 women in Kanchanaburi Province during the third trimester of their pregnancy and again during their postpartum period (between 8 and 13 weeks postpartum). All the women interviewed reported to have at least four prenatal visits. Almost all of them reported to give birth at the government hospitals. Even though 72 percent of these women stated during the prenatal interview to use the postpartum care services, only one-third actually completed the two national standard postpartum care (scheduled during 1-2 weeks and 6-8 weeks postpartum).

The current study employs transcript analysis to explore influences of changes and continuity on the use of maternal service after delivery through the women's life history as well as motherhood experiences and their associated meanings. The findings of this study illustrate the ranges of issues influencing the women's postpartum use behaviour. Three main interwoven themes emerged recurrently from both the prenatal and postpartum interviews are (1) *the perceptions of wound and womb*, which are greatly embedded with several cultural concepts and varied with the methods of delivery; (2) *the availability of supports*, which is strongly couched in terms of the accompanying assistance, consultancy and infant care and; (3) *the attitude towards the health care system*, under which the emerging sub-themes include the feature of services provided; the understanding of the scheduling service system; and the feelings towards the health care providers. Within each main theme, barriers and facilitators emerged to explain the usage behaviour. The influences of these themes play vital roles in the women's decision making process whether or not to utilize the postpartum care. Since the existing studies on postpartum care are relatively scarce and most of them focused only upon certain points of postpartum period, the findings from our study therefore not only merit in filling the literature gap, but also provide a perspective of the postpartum usage through the pregnancy-to-motherhood transition.