

World Vision Ireland

Sociocultural influences on the health and nutrition of women and children: the key role of grandmothers

A qualitative study by World Vision Ireland. Carried out by Dr. Judi Aubel of Grandmother Project-Senegal.

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GRANDMOTHER
PROJECT CHANGE THROUGH CULTURE



Rationale for study

- Maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) interventions typically look at Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP) of pregnant women and mothers
- In the Mauritanian context, the individual is part of a social and cultural system that influences his or her attitudes and practices
- Study focused on the analysis of the family and community systems of which pregnant women and mothers are part



Study outline

Conceptual Framework

- 1) the structure of families and cultural and religious values that influence MNCH
 - 2) the roles and influences of family and community actors on MNCH
 - 3) the standards and practices followed in families.
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- Qualitative study led by social anthropologist
 - Peulh and Moor communities
 - FGDs with women of reproductive age, grandmothers (/older women), fathers, community leaders
 - Tailored participatory tools used in dialogue



Roles and influence at critical times in MNCH

- Pregnancy / ante-natal care – grandmother; aunts
- Care for newborn – grandmother supports
- Breastfeeding - grandmother guides
- Complementary feeding – grandmother decides; aunts support
- Care of sick infant – grandmother diagnoses and provides first treatment
- Community Health Worker, nurses, midwives – provide information and support
- Financial resources for care at all stages – husband provides

Women of all generations are involved in care of mother and baby but Grandmother is the main source of knowledge and experience – mother and others will always defer to her.



Household practices – some findings

- Nutrition during pregnancy (Peulh community reduce intake from 7th month)
- Grandmothers promote nutritious foods and iron/folic acid
- Grandmothers influence amount of rest taken by pregnant women
- Increased intake of food for mothers is promoted more during breastfeeding than pregnancy
- Introduction of foods and water between 2-5 months due to perceptions around quantity and quality of breastmilk; water commonly given by grandmothers
- Sick infant – initial diagnosis and treatment by grandmother /grandmother leaders esp. re diarrhoea; possible inadequate intake of liquids.



Some recommendations

- Support intergenerational and collective responsibility towards mothers and babies
- Build on the central supportive role of the grandmother
- Support dialogue between grandmothers and health personnel on their role. Not based on 'messaging'
- ANC sessions - opportunity to engage with grandmothers/aunts
- Sessions of appreciation
- Areas for dialogue: appropriate weight gain for pregnant women, introduction of complementary foods, exclusive breastfeeding