

Pluralistic Maternal Health Seeking Behaviour: A Study Among the Karbis of Kamrup District, Assam

Mousumi Nath Mazumder

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to study the situation which has led to the acceptance of allopathic along with traditional medicines in seeking maternal health care among Karbi women residing in different areas of urban localities in Kamrup district, Assam. A cross sectional survey has been conducted among 354 Karbi women aged 15-49 years having atleast one child aged less than 10 years. It has been observed that only 31.6% of the Karbi women had received ante natal check-up at the time of pregnancy and about 46% of Karbi women had their deliveries at home. The health care sub centres available within the vicinity have inadequate health care workers, and non-availability or shortage of medicine discourages them to access help from the centres. The emergence of pluralistic health seeking behavior is mainly due to low income and education and traditional beliefs in the indigenous medical care or spiritual healers at early stage of any health problem and subsequently to the doctors in PHC or at government hospitals depending on the complication of the treatment.

Keywords: Karbi women, maternal health, pluralistic health care, traditional healers, spiritual healers, modern medicine

Introduction

Health seeking behaviour has been defined as “any activity undertaken by individuals who perceive themselves to have a health problem or to be ill for the purpose of finding an appropriate remedy” (Ward et al. 1997: 21). Utilization of health services is a complex behavioural phenomenon and the factors determining the health behaviours depends on various factors such as: physical, socio-economic, cultural and political (Kroeber 1983). Health seeking behaviour is heterogenous in nature and selection of a health care system, public or private, formal or non-formal, may depend on socio-demographic factors, social structures, level of education, cultural beliefs and practices, gender discrimination, status of women, economic and political systems environmental conditions, and the disease pattern and health care system itself (Katung 2001). Anthropological studies are particularly characterized by the use of ethnography to understand the health, illness and health care. Their studies revealed that,

MOUSUMI NATH MAZUMDER, Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of Anthropology, Amity University, Noida, Uttar Pradesh. Email: mn.mazumder@amity.edu