



SUMMARY

Title of the Project: To develop a package for self-care during perinatal period to improve maternal and child health as per WHO guidelines (2019)(**PO no 202654124**)

Introduction

The perinatal period is critical for the health of the mother and her baby. Implementing good perinatal care can reduce the risk of complications during pregnancy, promotes foetal health and development, minimize complications in infants, and reduce the risk of maternal and neonatal tetanus. Self-care interventions are important for empowering mothers and families to take care of themselves and the community healthcare providers to promote health. Strengthening self-care during this critical period through innovative approaches is essential for improving maternal and child health and reducing healthcare costs imposed on healthcare system. Further, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of self-care and the need for innovative approaches such as mobile health and telemedicine to supplement healthcare services.

Objectives

- To undertake need assessment for self-care during pregnancy and postnatal period.
- To develop a draft package on self-care during perinatal period based on WHO guidelines. The package will include audios with key messages, text messages and frequently asked questions (FAQs) to address common concerns and promote self-care.
- To field test the package using different social media platforms for delivery of the self-care messages.

Methodology and Results

Staff members were hired and oriented about the project. ASHA workers played an essential role in providing information on pregnancy and childbirth. This data was then utilized to identify and recruit individuals from the target population who possessed smartphones with internet connectivity. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants before proceeding with the project.

To conduct a comprehensive needs assessment, thematic discussions were conducted within WhatsApp groups that were specifically created for this purpose. The topics of these discussions revolved around self-care and care-seeking during pregnancy. Additionally, telephonic interviews were conducted to gather further insights. This combination of methods allowed for a thorough assessment of the needs of the target population.

Based on the findings from the needs assessment and a review of existing literature, a package of resources was developed. This package consisted of:

- 103 frequently asked questions (available in both English and Hindi),
- 33 text-based audio scripts (in English and Hindi),
- 33 audio recordings in Hindi (ranging from 4 to 9 minutes), and
- 30 topics covered in an illustrated guide (available in English and Hindi).



The package was delivered to participants through WhatsApp chats, and 40 thematic discussions were held specifically focused on selected frequently asked questions. During these 40 thematic discussions, a considerable amount of engagement was observed. A total of 641 responses were received regarding topics related to pregnancy, with response numbers varying between 17 to 48. Additionally, 407 responses were received regarding postnatal care, with response numbers ranging between 12 to 29.

To further support the self-care efforts of the participants during the pregnancy, delivery, and postnatal period, a total of 17 Zoom meetings were held over a period of two-months. These meetings had a strong attendance rate, with participant numbers ranging between 23 to 43 individuals. Each meeting lasted between 40 to 57 minutes and included the playing of an audio recording, followed by thorough discussions on the questions and experiences shared by participants. The participants then had the opportunity to share their experiences from the Zoom meetings within the WhatsApp groups. The project received a total of 251 endorsements from participants, indicating the positive impact it had on their experiences.

Conclusions

The feasibility of a multimedia phone package, consisting of FAQs, audios, and an illustrated guide, delivered through WhatsApp chats, thematic discussions, and Zoom meetings during the perinatal period, was successfully demonstrated. This innovative approach has the potential to be applicable even during pandemic emergencies like COVID-19. This study helped to address existing gaps in perinatal care, i.e. inadequate contacts with the health system specifically during COVID-19. The utilization of Zoom meetings revealed promising opportunities for direct communication with beneficiaries and has the potential to greatly improve the quality of perinatal care through increased self-care. Furthermore, the application of this multimedia package proved to be feasible as well as cost-effective. However, the issue of equity remains challenging, as families without access to a smartphone with internet connectivity had to be excluded.

Way forward

It is recommended that efforts be made to promote self-care and strengthen perinatal care through the utilization of such innovative tools. Moreover, further work is necessary to ensure local adaptation in accordance with national health policies.