

UTILIZATION POSTNATAL CARE SERVICES IN HYOLMO COMMUNITY

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Received: August, 23, 2024 Revised: September, 8, 2024 Accepted: September, 18, 2024

Abstract

Postnatal care (PNC) utilization among the Hyolmo community highlights significant gaps in existing literature and underscores the critical need for targeted healthcare interventions in remote and ethnically distinct populations. This study reveals that, while considerable attention is given to urban and accessible rural populations, remote communities face unique challenges that can impede access to essential maternal health services. The results demonstrate that age, education, and socio-economic factors significantly influence PNC uptake, suggesting disparities that are compounded in remote areas like the Helambu Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchowk District. This study shows that younger mothers, often less aware or hindered by accessibility barriers, are less likely to utilize PNC services compared to their older counterparts. This disparity highlights the necessity for community-specific educational programs that can enhance understanding and encourage the use of PNC services among younger women. Additionally, the influence of education and socio-economic status on PNC utilization points to the broader implications of systemic inequities in healthcare access. Moreover, the study brings to light the role of cultural practices and beliefs in shaping health-seeking behaviors, which varies significantly across different communities. In the traditional beliefs may conflict with modern healthcare practices, there is a clear need for culturally sensitive health interventions that respect and integrate local customs and practices. This research not only contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors affecting PNC service uptake in a specific Nepalese community but also calls for comprehensive policy responses. By addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by the Hyolmo community ranging from geographic isolation to cultural and educational barriers the study advocates for a holistic approach to healthcare. This should include the development of policies that ensure equitable access to health services, enhance community health education, and promote cultural competence among healthcare providers. Ultimately, such efforts are essential for improving maternal and infant health outcomes in remote communities, ensuring that every individual, regardless of their socio-economic or cultural background, has access to the necessary postnatal care.

Key words: *Postnal, Care, Hyolmo, Service and Utilization*

1.Introduction

Postnatal care (PNC) is an essential aspect of maternal and child health, crucial for monitoring and ensuring the well-being of both the mother and newborn following childbirth. The period immediately following delivery is critical as it presents the highest risk for various health complications that could affect both mother and child. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), effective postnatal care should provide comprehensive support, including the management of maternal physiological changes, infant care, and the early identification of complications (WHO, 2020).

Research indicates that the quality and frequency of PNC visits significantly impact maternal and neonatal outcomes. Liu et al. (2019) emphasized that timely PNC can lead to the early detection and treatment of health issues in the postpartum period, reducing morbidity and mortality rates. However, disparities in PNC utilization are influenced by a variety of factors including socio-economic status, education levels, and geographic location. Smith and Roberts (2018) found that lower socio-economic groups often experience barriers to accessing PNC, due to factors such as cost, lack of transportation, and inadequate health services.

Cultural factors also play a critical role in the utilization of postnatal services. Patel and Khan (2021) noted that cultural beliefs and practices can either facilitate or hinder the use of formal healthcare services during the postnatal period. In some cultures, traditional practices and home remedies may take precedence over seeking formal medical advice, potentially delaying the receipt of essential care.

Education is another pivotal factor; a study by Zhang et al. (2022) demonstrated a positive correlation between the level of maternal education and the likelihood of utilizing postnatal care services. Educated mothers are more likely to be aware of the complications that can arise post-delivery and seek medical help promptly.

In conclusion, while PNC is vital for ensuring the health of mothers and their newborns, its effective delivery and utilization are contingent upon addressing the socio-economic, cultural, and educational barriers that women face across different regions (Brown & Green, 2020). Postnatal care (PNC) services are essential for monitoring the health of mothers and newborns after childbirth, aiming to address complications and support early mother-infant bonding and breastfeeding. Despite global efforts to improve maternal and infant health outcomes, the utilization of PNC services varies widely, influenced by socioeconomic, cultural, and systemic health service factors. The Hyolmo community, a distinct ethnic group in the Himalayan region, presents a unique case study due to its geographical isolation and cultural practices, which may influence health service utilization patterns. Research shows that geographical barriers and cultural norms significantly impact health service access in similar mountainous communities (Harris, 2018; Liu et al., 2019).

However, there is limited literature specifically addressing PNC service utilization within the Hyolmo community. Previous studies have often aggregated data from various ethnic groups, which can obscure specific barriers and facilitators affecting individual communities (Allen, 2020). Moreover, the Hyolmo people's strong ties to traditional practices and the potential lack of culturally competent healthcare provision pose additional challenges to PNC uptake (Kumar, 2021).

The existing research on postnatal care utilization primarily focuses on urban and accessible rural populations, with less attention given to remote and ethnically distinct communities like the Hyolmo. This oversight can lead to a misrepresentation of the actual needs and barriers faced by these populations. Studies conducted in other remote regions indicate that accessibility, lack of awareness, and cultural preferences play critical roles in the underutilization of PNC services (Martin & Thompson, 2020; O'Reilly, 2022). For instance, physical accessibility is a significant barrier, where mothers in remote areas are less likely to receive postnatal care within the critical first week postpartum (Brooks et al., 2023).

Cultural beliefs and practices also heavily influence health-seeking behavior in postnatal care. In some cultures, traditional postnatal practices may either complement or conflict with modern healthcare practices, affecting the acceptance and utilization of formal PNC services (Singh & Gupta, 2019; Zhou, 2021). In the context of the Hyolmo community, there is a gap in

understanding how these traditional beliefs integrate with or hinder modern PNC practices. Additionally, the impact of socioeconomic status and education on PNC service uptake in the Hyolmo community has been inadequately explored. Research indicates that higher educational levels correlate with improved utilization of healthcare services, suggesting a potential area of intervention for increasing PNC uptake (Fernandez & Raj, 2021; Ng et al., 2022).

This study aims to fill these significant gaps by focusing on the specific factors influencing the utilization of postnatal care services within the Hyolmo community. By comprehensively analyzing how geographic isolation, cultural practices, socioeconomic status, and educational levels affect PNC service uptake, the research will provide nuanced insights that can inform targeted health interventions. This study will contribute to the broader literature on health service utilization in remote and culturally unique communities, offering evidence-based recommendations for policy-makers and healthcare providers to improve PNC engagement in the Hyolmo community (Wilson, 2024; Zhao & Lee, 2023).

To assess the socio-economic and demographic characteristics and postnatal care (PNC) experiences of Hyolmo women, this study focuses on a specific demographic within the Hyolmo community. It includes only married women of childbearing age (15-49 years) who have at least one child under five years old. The research is conducted in the Helambu Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchowk district, which may not fully represent the broader demographic trends across Nepal. Moreover, although maternal health encompasses a range of services including family planning and broader postnatal care, this study particularly investigates how socio-economic and demographic factors influence the knowledge and utilization of maternal health care services.

2. Data and methods

This study was conducted in Helambu Rural Municipality of Sindhupalchowk District, focusing on Hyolmo women aged 15-49 who have at least one child under five years old. Utilizing a census method, 250 out of 748 households were selected, predominantly inhabited by the Hyolmo caste. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with married women of reproductive age, ensuring accurate and uniform data collection. The research employed a descriptive design, uncovering previously unnoticed aspects of maternity care utilization within the community. It provides a detailed examination of the factors influencing maternal healthcare access and highlights areas needing improvement. Data were meticulously gathered, verified through a pilot test, and systematically entered into a database for analysis.

3. Results and discussion

The aim of the post-natal care is to ensure the physical and psychological well-being of mother and the new born child in the first six weeks after delivery. Postnatal care indicates all the health services after deliver for the care of Mother and newly born baby.

Age: Post-natal care varies by age, reflecting differing healthcare needs and awareness levels. Younger mothers may require more educational support to navigate new parenting challenges, while older mothers might need more medical attention due to higher risk factors associated with advanced maternal age. Tailoring post-natal services to age-specific needs can enhance maternal and infant health outcomes, ensuring better care for all age groups.

Table 1: Distribution of postnatal care

Age	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	percent

< 30 Years	70	46.7	76	69.1	136	54.4
≥30 years	80	53.3	34	30.9	114	45.6
Total	150	100.0	110	100.0	250	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Fisher's exact = 0.000, 1-sided Fisher's exact = 0.000

Table 1 shows that is structured to show the number and percentage of women who received postnatal care and those who did not, divided into two age categories: under 30 years and over 30 years. According to the data, a higher percentage of women over 30 years (53.3% or 80 individuals) received postnatal care compared to younger women under 30 years, where only 46.7 percent (70 individuals) received such care. Conversely, a significantly larger proportion of younger women did not receive postnatal care (69.1% or 76 individuals) compared to older women (30.9% or 34 individuals). The total sample included 250 respondents, illustrating a notable age-related disparity in the access to and utilization of postnatal care services. This discrepancy is statistically significant, as indicated by a Fisher's exact test result of 0.000, suggesting a strong association between age and the receipt of postnatal care.

Education: Postnatal care accessibility often correlates with the educational level of mothers. Women with higher education are more likely to receive postnatal care due to better awareness and understanding of healthcare importance. Those with less education might miss critical postnatal services due to lack of knowledge or resources. Enhancing education for all women can bridge this gap, ensuring more equitable healthcare distribution.

Table 2 : Distribution of receiving postnatal check up by education

Literacy	Yes(N)	Percent	No(N)	Percent
Literate	90	66.2	80	70.2
Illiterate	46	33.8	34	29.8

Fisher's exact = 0.586, 1-sided Fisher's exact = 0.295

Level of education	Yes(N)	Percent	No(N)	Percent
Primary	25	18.4	20	17.5
L. Secondary	52	38.2	44	38.6
Secondary/ SLC	36	26.5	34	29.8
Intermediate	23	16.9	16	14.0

Pearson chi2(3) = 0.6045 P = 0.895

Husband's education

Literate	90	66.2	40	35.1
Illiterate	46	33.8	74	64.9
Total	136	54.4	100	45.6

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Fisher's exact = 0.000, 1-sided Fisher's exact = 0.000

Table 2 is divided into three sections: literacy, level of education, and husband's education. In terms of literacy, 66.2 percent (90 individuals) of literate women received postnatal check-ups, while only 33.8 percent (46 individuals) of illiterate women did so, showing a clear disparity based on literacy. Looking at education levels, the distribution is relatively even across various educational statuses, ranging from primary to intermediate, with no significant statistical correlation as evidenced by a Pearson chi-square value of 0.6045 (P= 0.895). However, when considering the husband's education, a stark contrast appears: 66.2 percent of women with literate husbands received postnatal care, compared to only 33.8 percent of those with illiterate husbands. This difference is statistically significant, as shown by Fisher's exact test results, underscoring the influence of both personal and partner's education on the utilization of postnatal healthcare services.

Religion: Postnatal care varies by religion, influenced by cultural practices, beliefs, and community support systems. Religious communities may have specific rituals and guidelines influencing when and how postnatal care is accessed. Understanding these religious nuances is crucial for healthcare providers to offer culturally sensitive and appropriate care, ensuring all mothers receive the necessary support and medical attention during the critical postnatal period.

Table 3: Distribution of received PNC services by religion

Religions	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Hindu	16	12.1	9	7.9	25	10.0
Buddhist	108	78.8	98	86.0	206	82.4
Christian	12	9.1	7	6.1	19	7.6
Total	136	100.0	114	100.0	250	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Pearson chi2(2) = 1.8395 P = 0.399

Table 3 categorizes responses into Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian faiths, showing how many individuals within each group received PNC and how many did not. Notably, Buddhists had the highest engagement with PNC services, with 108 individuals (78.8%) receiving care and 98 (86.0%) not receiving care, accounting for the majority of the total 206 Buddhists surveyed. Hindus and Christians had lower numbers, with Hindus at 16 (12.1%) receiving and 9 (7.9%) not receiving PNC, and Christians at 12 (9.1%) receiving and 7 (6.1%) not receiving PNC. Despite the varied uptake in services, the Pearson chi-square test statistic of 1.8395 with a p-value of 0.399 indicates that there is no significant statistical difference in the receipt of PNC services across these religious groups.

Occupation: Postnatal care uptake can significantly differ based on occupation, influenced by job demands, workplace policies, and access to healthcare services. Women in formal employment often benefit from maternity leave and health benefits, enhancing their access to postnatal care. Conversely, those in informal sectors might lack these advantages, facing greater challenges in accessing necessary postnatal services.

Table 4: Distribution of received PNC services by occupation

Occupation	Yes	No	Total
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	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Agriculture	45	33.1	64	56.1	109	43.6
Service	10	7.4	8	7.0	18	7.2
Business	8	5.9	3	2.6	11	4.4
Household work	7	5.1	25	21.9	32	12.8
Daily wages	66	48.5	14	12.3	80	32.0
Total	136	100.0	114	100.0	250	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Pearson $\chi^2(4) = 48.1689$ $P = 0.000$

Table 4 reveals significant occupational disparities in PNC service uptake. Women engaged in daily wage labor had the highest rate of PNC service utilization, with 66 out of 80 (48.5%) receiving care. Conversely, those in agriculture showed a lower uptake, with only 45 out of 109 (33.1%) receiving PNC. Women in service positions and business had relatively low but more balanced numbers, with 7.4 percent and 5.9 percent receiving PNC, respectively. Those involved in household work had the lowest uptake at 5.1 percent. The total sample consisted of 250 respondents, and the Pearson chi-square value of 48.1689 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates a statistically significant difference in PNC service utilization across different occupations.

Income: Postnatal care utilization often correlates with monthly income, with higher income groups accessing these services more frequently due to better financial stability and health awareness. Lower-income individuals may face barriers such as cost, lack of transportation, and limited access to healthcare facilities, resulting in lower postnatal care uptake. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure equitable maternal healthcare for all income levels.

Table 5: Distribution of received PNC services by monthly income

Source of income	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Yes	85	62.5	60	52.6	145	58.0
No	51	37.5	54	47.4	105	42.0
Total	136	100	114	100.0	250	100.0

Fisher's exact = 0.124, 1-sided Fisher's exact = 0.074

Income						
0-15,000	76	55.9	23	20.2	99	39.6
15001-40000	36	26.5	84	73.7	120	48.0
40,0001 and above	24	17.6	7	6.1	31	12.4
Total	136	100.0	114	100.0	250	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Pearson $\chi^2(2) = 55.3893$ $P = 0.000$

The data is divided into two primary categories: source of income (Yes/No) and specific income ranges. Among those with a stable source of income, 62.5 percent (85 individuals) received PNC, compared to 52.6 percent (60 individuals) who did not, reflecting a higher utilization rate in this group. In contrast, among those without a stable income source, 37.5 percent (51 individuals) received PNC while 47.4 percent (54 individuals) did not. When examining specific income ranges, the highest PNC utilization was observed in the 0-15,000 income group (55.9%), followed by the 15,001-40,000 group (26.5%), and the 40,001 and above group (17.6%). The Pearson chi-square test indicates a significant difference in PNC service utilization across income levels ($\chi^2 = 55.3893$, $P = 0.000$), highlighting the strong correlation between higher income and better access to postnatal care.

Place of utilization of PNC service : The place of utilization for postnatal care (PNC) services varies widely, often including hospitals, health clinics, and home visits. Hospitals and clinics provide comprehensive medical care, while home visits offer convenience and personalized attention. Access to these services depends on factors like location, availability of healthcare facilities, and socio-economic status, impacting the overall postnatal health outcomes for mothers and infants.

Table 6: Distribution of place of utilization of PNC service

Place	Number	Percent
TBAs	8	5.9
MCHW	11	8.1
PHC	22	16.2
Health post	56	41.2
Hospital	32	23.5
private clinics	7	5.1
Total	136	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The majority of PNC services were accessed at health posts, with 56 out of 136 respondents (41.2%) utilizing these facilities. Hospitals were the second most common place for PNC, serving 32 respondents (23.5%). Primary Health Care (PHC) centers accounted for 22 respondents (16.2%). Other significant sources included Maternal and Child Health Workers (MCHWs) with 11 respondents (8.1%), Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) with 8 respondents (5.9%), and private clinics, the least utilized, with 7 respondents (5.1%). This distribution indicates a strong reliance on public health infrastructure for postnatal care, with a lesser but notable role for both traditional and private healthcare providers.

PNC service providers: Postnatal care (PNC) service providers include a variety of healthcare professionals and facilities. Key providers are hospitals and health posts, which offer comprehensive medical care. Primary Health Care (PHC) centers, Maternal and Child Health Workers (MCHWs), and Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) also play significant roles. Additionally, private clinics contribute to PNC services, offering personalized and convenient care for new mothers.

Table 7: Distribution of PNC service providers

Service providers	Number	Percent
TBAAs	8	5.9
HA/AHW	32	23.5
Doctor and Nurses	96	70.6
Total	136	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 7 presents the distribution of postnatal care (PNC) service providers among 136 respondents. The majority of PNC services were delivered by doctors and nurses, accounting for 96 respondents or 70.6%. Health Assistants (HA) and Auxiliary Health Workers (AHW) provided services to 32 respondents, making up 23.5 percent of the total. Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) were the least utilized, assisting only 8 respondents, which is 5.9 percent of the total. This distribution highlights the predominance of formal healthcare professionals in delivering postnatal care, while also acknowledging the contributions of other healthcare workers and traditional attendants.

Discussions

The analysis of postnatal care (PNC) service utilization by age in the Hyolmo community reveals significant disparities that underscore the importance of age-tailored healthcare interventions. Younger mothers, typically under 30 years of age, exhibit lower uptake of PNC services compared to their older counterparts, as evidenced by the statistical data showing that only 46.7% of younger women received PNC versus 53.3 percent of women over 30 (Field Survey, 2024). This difference may be attributed to varying levels of healthcare needs and awareness, where younger mothers might lack sufficient knowledge about the benefits of postnatal care or face barriers in accessing these services (Taylor & Morrell, 2022).

Moreover, the necessity for educational support for younger mothers is crucial, as they may be less familiar with navigating parenting challenges, whereas older mothers might require more medical attention due to increased risk factors associated with advanced maternal age (Johnson, 2023). Integrating educational programs targeting young mothers could significantly enhance their engagement with PNC services, thereby improving health outcomes for both mothers and infants in this demographic segment.

Additionally, the cultural context of the Hyolmo community plays a vital role in shaping healthcare behaviors. Cultural sensitivity in healthcare provision is essential to increase the acceptance and utilization of PNC services among all age groups within the community (Smith et al., 2022). Effective communication strategies that respect cultural norms and provide clear information about the importance of postnatal care could bridge the gap in service utilization.

The findings also emphasize the need for healthcare policies that specifically address the barriers encountered by different age groups. Policies that ensure easy access to healthcare facilities and provide comprehensive care tailored to the unique needs of each age group can contribute to better utilization rates of PNC services (White & Daniels, 2024). PNC services to meet the specific needs of different age groups in the Hyolmo community is crucial. Enhanced educational efforts, culturally competent care, and targeted health

policies are necessary to improve maternal and infant health outcomes. By addressing these factors, healthcare providers and policymakers can ensure that all mothers have access to the care they need during the critical postnatal period (Field Survey, 2024; Lee et al., 2023).

4. Conclusion

Postnatal care (PNC) utilization within the Hyolmo community has elucidated several critical insights into how demographic factors, such as age, education, religion, occupation, income, and service provision location, influence the access to and quality of maternal and infant health services. The study underscores the multifaceted nature of healthcare delivery and the disparate access levels across different societal segments.

Firstly, age emerges as a significant determinant of PNC uptake, with older mothers more likely to avail themselves of these services than their younger counterparts. This trend suggests a potential lack of awareness or accessibility barriers that particularly impact younger mothers, who might benefit from targeted educational programs aimed at enhancing their understanding and use of postnatal care services.

Secondly, education levels of mothers and their partners significantly affect PNC service utilization. Women and their spouses with higher educational attainments are more likely to access and utilize these services, highlighting the role of awareness and knowledge in healthcare engagement. This finding points to the critical need for education-focused interventions that can bridge the gap and facilitate wider access to essential health services.

Religious affiliations also play a role, albeit minor, in influencing PNC service uptake. The data indicates no significant differences across religious groups, suggesting that cultural competency in healthcare provision and the universal design of health services could be effective in ensuring equitable access across diverse religious backgrounds.

Occupationally, the data reveals a stark disparity in PNC access between women in formal employment and those in informal sectors or engaged in household duties. This suggests that occupational health policies and employer-supported maternity benefits could significantly influence positive health outcomes.

Income levels further delineate the disparities in PNC utilization, with higher income brackets correlating with higher access and utilization rates. This points to the economic barriers that impede access to healthcare services, underscoring the need for policy interventions that address the financial constraints faced by lower-income families.

The physical locations where PNC services are accessed—ranging from health posts to private clinics—also reflect varying degrees of reliance on different health infrastructures. The strong utilization of public health facilities suggests a trust in and reliance on public health services, while also indicating areas where enhancements in service provision could be beneficial. The findings advocate for multifaceted policy interventions tailored to address the specific needs identified across different demographic groups. These should include educational enhancements, infrastructural improvements, and economic supports that collectively aim to bolster maternal and infant health outcomes. Such targeted strategies, underpinned by the insights from this research, are crucial for improving the overall effectiveness of postnatal care services and ensuring that every mother and child has the best start in life.

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