EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WITH POSTPARTUM COMPLICATION IN BATTAMBANG PROVINCE, CAMBODIA

VONG LENIN

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VONG LENIN 5238079 SHHS/M

M.A. (HEALTH SOCIAL SCIENCE)

THESIS ADVISORY COMMITTEE: KANOKWAN THARAWAN, Ph. D, PENCHAN SHERER, Ph. D, SUCHADA THAWEESIT, Ph. D

ABSTRACT

High maternal mortality is one of significant problem in Cambodia, compared to other countries in South East Asia (472 maternal deaths per 100,000 live birth, CDHS 2005). Postpartum complication is one of the leading causes among major three factors contributing to maternal death. Thus, understanding experiences of women when they have complication from women’s point of view might contribute to reduce maternal mortality.

This research examined the perception by Cambodian women concerning post partum complications (PPC), how these women defined PPC and its occurrences, their health seeking behavior during PPC episodes, and socio-cultural factors that affected their decision to seek care.

This is a qualitative study that employed three methods of in-depth interview, observation, and documentary research of health reports and health education materials. The research was carried out in Battambang Province, Cambodia. Eight women who gave birth in 2010 who identified themselves as having had PPC experiences were interviewed. Other resource persons included village health volunteers, healthcare providers, the women’s husbands and mothers, traditional birth attendants and village leaders. The Explanatory Model was employed as a conceptual framework for data analysis.

The findings reveal that Cambodian women refer to PPC as Toas, which in the local vernacular means a kind of problem or relapse that happens to women after delivery. Childbirth and Toas are related. The symptoms of Toas include high body temperature, diarrhea, headache, abdominal pain, palpitations and weakness. The locals believe that these symptoms and their associations are caused by hard work and worries prior to childbirth and inappropriate food consumption within a few days after childbirth. Traditional practices are performed to prevent Toas. These include home remedies, traditional medicine, and assistance from traditional healers and traditional birth attendants. If the symptoms persist, modern medical treatment by a private practitioner is considered. Modern medicine at government health settings is not popular among women in Battambang.

The findings demonstrate how local perceptions of illness form and shape Battambang women’s choices of PPC treatment. It is suggested that cultural-sensitive communications between healthcare providers and their clients should be improved.

KEY WORDS: POSTPARTUM COMPLICATION / HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOR / TOAS / STAYING ON FIRE

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