What is husband's and mother-in-law's involvement? Why is it important?

By husband's and mothers-in-law's involvement, we mean active participation of both husband and mother-in-law in supporting and taking care of mother before, during and after pregnancy, as well as in feeding and caring of children. It includes all things, being knowledgeable about health care needs of mothers, providing nutritious food to mothers, taking her for regular health check-up, sharing burden of work at home, making sure mothers have enough time for her and her children, helping mothers to take care of her children when she is busy, and that mothers have someone to go to when she needs help. Since both husband and mother-in-law have large decision making power in the household, their involvement is important for healthy pregnancy, fast and full recovery of mothers after delivery, healthy birth and development of children.

Facts

- Husband and mothers-in-law play minimal role in maternal and child health.

What we learned from our baseline survey and formative research:

- **Involvement of husbands in family planning is low.**
  - There is little interaction between husbands and wives about family planning.
  - Maternal and child health program focus mostly on women leaving fathers out from maternal and child health related messages and discussions, including family planning methods.

- **Absence of husbands constrains women's access to health care.**
  - Husbands have the responsibility to take both women and children for health check-up. When they are absent, wives have to seek support from a female member of the household, a neighbor or a friend to accompany her to health posts constraining her access to health care.

- **Knowledge and decision making power of husbands and mothers-in-law affect the types of food women get before, during and after pregnancy.**
  - Husbands are the main income earners, and along with mothers-in-law, are the main decision makers in purchasing household necessities including food for the family.
  - They do not prioritize dietary and care needs of women before and during pregnancy.
  - Husbands take the main responsibility to provide for nutritious food to new mothers after delivery, but the provision of nutritious food only lasts for two to three months.

- **While mothers-in-law sometimes feed babies during mothers' absence, husbands rarely do so.**
  - Many husbands are absent due to working abroad.
  - Those who are present, rarely support mothers in her work, and have little to no involvement in feeding and caring of infants.

- **Husbands are not a significant source of information on maternal and child health care needs.**
- Husbands have little interaction with their wives about family planning.
- Only few husbands gather information from other women in the community about dietary and care needs of new mothers and babies, and relay that information to their wives.

• **Mothers-in-law are a significant source of information on maternal and child health care needs.**
  - They provide new mothers with valuable advice on breastfeeding and complementary feeding though sometimes they pass on incorrect information.
  - They are open to learning and adopting newer approaches to taking care of mothers and children.

**What we all can do:**
- **Improve knowledge of husbands and mothers-in-law on maternal and child health and nutrition.** Inform husbands and mothers-in-law about need for additional, diverse and nutritional food for mothers and children, and provide support to them to make healthy food purchases.
- **Support women.** Inform and encourage husbands and other family members to support mothers to reduce her workload so that mothers have more time to take care of their babies. (e.g. purchase small amounts of meat for the mother and child, give the mother an extra hour of rest by helping with the household work)
- **Encourage husbands to take care of their wives and children.** For men who migrate to work, help build linkages to the families they leave behind for better support of their wives and babies.
- **Share stories** of families in which husbands take significant role in feeding and caring of mothers and children to encourage other husbands to do the same.

**Some practices you can help families work on:**
- Encourage men to discuss about family planning with their wives.
- Encourage and support mothers to go for health check-up.
- Provide support to mothers in taking care of children.

**You can get more information here:**

**Suaahara Baseline Survey Report (2013):** Here we report on child stunting and underweight, child wasting, child anemia, body mass index for women and anemia among women in districts where Suaahara is implementing programs and districts where it isn’t. The baseline also has a lot of information about behaviors on infant and young child feeding, agriculture, family planning and WASH.

**Formative Research Report (2013):** This study talks about infant and young child feeding practices, hygiene, other caregiving practices and families' aspirations for their children. The study also describes why people do or don't practice these behaviors.

Suaahara is funded by USAID and lasts from 2011 – 2016. Working with the government, we improve the nutritional status of women and children by helping them practice good nutrition, agriculture, WASH and family planning behaviors.

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