

Supporting Mothers of Pre-Term Babies

Pumwani Maternity Hospital Abandonment Prevention Program

VIDEO SUMMARY

Giving birth to a pre-term or low birth weight baby, or a child with a congenital condition, can be a challenging and traumatizing experience, particularly for women from marginalised or low socio-economic backgrounds. It can increase the challenges of caring for a newborn baby, erode a new mother's confidence and, as such, affect attachment. It can also result in stigma, shame and rejection from extended family, and therefore increase the risk of child abandonment.

In this video, Grace Mwangi, discusses the specific support needs of mothers of pre-term babies or those with a congenital condition. Drawing on her extensive experience of abandonment prevention and family strengthening work in

Kenya, Grace highlights the implications of the combination of shock, stigma, social isolation and rejection and the specific developmental challenges of a pre-term baby on attachment and survival. Furthermore, Grace provides key insights into how to provide holistic early intervention support to new mothers of pre-term babies. She focuses on how to help women come to terms with their situation and counter stigma and discrimination in order to promote the value of caring for a pre-term child. She also explains the importance of assisting mothers to recognise the cues of pre-term infants and provide responsive care to promote optimal development and survival.

DISCUSSION TOPIC

In the video, Grace explains how the capacity of a baby to communicate its needs through signals is often affected by being premature, of low birth weight or as a result of having other congenital conditions. As such, the mother may struggle to pick on the cues of the baby and respond accordingly. This can directly impact on the baby's health and survival chances, unless rectified. Grace gives an interesting example of pre-term babies often being identifiable by their 'flat heads'. This is caused by babies spending significant periods of time lying down in one position. It indicates a lack of contact with the mother, including insufficient time spent breastfeeding, as mothers struggle to pick up on the hunger signals from their babies. Grace explains how important it is for mothers to be given timely support and encouragement to become 'strong observers', in order to avert potential issues and promote optimal attachment, development and survival.

In your context:

-  Is delivering a pre-term baby or a baby with other special needs associated with stigma, discrimination or other cultural perceptions that can impact on caregiving or increase the risk of abandonment? If so, discuss what these are and whether they affect all women equally or have a heightened impact on certain groups of women.

-  Discuss your experiences or the experience of your peers in supporting mothers of pre-term or special needs babies. What has been effective? What changes to the approach have been made in response to learning and experience?

-  What support is available to mothers of pre-term or special needs babies to become strong observers of their baby's communication cues in a hospital setting? How are women in need of support identified and referred to services?

-  What, if any, are the gaps in these services and how could they be addressed, either through your services, programs, or through partnerships, networks or advocacy efforts you are a part of?



DISCUSSION TOPIC

Grace highlights an important issue in the video: the need to provide emotional, social and psychological support to mothers of pre-term babies. Building women's resilience is key to their ability to provide the strong support that their babies may require, both immediately and over an extended period of time. However, as Grace states, 'this is a journey' and it starts by demonstrating 'appreciation' or value for their babies, particularly in the face of stigma and discrimination. Social workers need to actively demonstrate this value in the way they engage with the baby, which in turn can reassure and encourage the mother to do the same and provide adequate care. In Grace's example of the Pumwani Maternity Hospital Abandonment Prevention Program, this is done through open forums, one-on-one support, and longer-term follow up in the community.

In your context:

- ① What are some of the specific emotional, social and psychological stressors or issues that mothers of pre-term babies may face and require support for?

- ① Discuss some practical examples of emotional, social and psychological support that may meet the needs of mothers of pre-term babies, taking into account the unique cultural and social dynamics of your country or community.

- ① How can some of these supports or social work practices be integrated into your practice or organisation's work?

- ① Is there a need for greater awareness of these challenges and support needs for mothers of pre-term babies? If so, which stakeholder groups would awareness-raising or advocacy efforts need to target and how could this be approached?