

## Study on maternal consciousness among Nepalese mothers in Kathmandu, Nepal

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### ABSTRACT

Present study was carried out to study the status of maternal consciousness among Nepalese women living in Kathmandu. Of the total 360 mothers of different ethnic groups included in this study, only 55.5% mothers were found to have a positive feeling regarding their pregnancy (pregnancy is a wonderful event for women) (strongly positive 16.6%; positive 39.2%). Over one-fourth of the mothers (27.7%) had negative feelings (strongly negative 8.8%; negative = 19.0%) and 14.4% had neither positive nor negative feeling. Among the different ethnic groups, *Lama (Tamang/Sherpa)* ethnic had highest rate (nearly two-third) of positive feeling towards pregnancy. However, the positive feeling towards born baby was very high (77.9%). The level of feeling of love to their baby was different in different ethnic groups. Compared with other population groups, *Dalits* had higher level of positive feelings about giving a child birth, childcare and self-sacrifice for the shake of children.

**Keywords:** Maternal consciousness, mothers, ethnic groups, Nepal.

### INTRODUCTION

Maternal consciousness is very important for both mother and her child for the maternal bonding. Maternal bonding typically occurs because of pregnancy and childbirth, and are influenced by numerous of factors, physical and emotional that makes a mother experiencing the “instantly-in-mother-love” emotions. Bonding behavior, significantly influence both psychical and physical health of children in different periods of their life.<sup>1,2</sup> However, the formation of the maternal bond during pregnancy is an area of scientific interest explored very little so far.<sup>3</sup> According to Kennel and Klaus (1972),<sup>4</sup> the development and growth of the babies taken care by the mothers for more than 16 hours in a day was significantly better compared with those taken care for less than 16 hours. Hence, there is great importance of the close and positive attachment of mothers with their babies for the better development and growth; failure to bond result into negative consequences.<sup>5</sup>

In the past, family bonding was very strong and there was very good environment for the growth and development of children. During recent years, the family bonding particularly in the developed countries has reduced significantly. This has been attributed to the fast life and out working by the mothers immediately after giving birth to their babies. As a result, baby care home and baby sitting system have emerged. In the case of Japanese society, this became prominent after the Second World War as a consequence of fast economic growth. This has resulted into negative effect not only on the

growth and development of the babies but also the other physical and mental troubles.<sup>6</sup>

Family and maternal-child bonding is thought to be still strong in developing countries including Nepal. In Nepal, still over 80% of the households in Nepal are in rural areas<sup>7</sup> and the maternal, infant and under-five child mortality rates are still higher compared with other countries in South Asia Region.<sup>8</sup> However, no data with regard to the status of maternal-child bonding are available in most of the developing countries. We, therefore, aimed to study the status of maternal consciousness among the mothers in the Kathmandu Valley and this paper reports the findings of the same.

### PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

Present study was carried out in the Kathmandu Valley, the capital city of Nepal. Information was collected using structured questionnaire based on “maternal consciousness scale” developed by Hanazawa (1992).<sup>9</sup> Questionnaire translated into Nepali language was used. Five persons were recruited and trained for interview of mothers, and the survey was done in the year 2005. A total of 360 mothers taking care of their children aged less than seven years were included in this study. Of them, 202 were of 30 and less than 30 years while, remaining 158 were of more than 30 years. Ethnic wise, *Brahmin/Chhetri* (the Hindu high caste people and most of them are educated and economically well off) accounted for 48.8% (n=176), whereas other ethnics such as *Adibashi-Janajati* or indigenous nationalities (*Lama,*

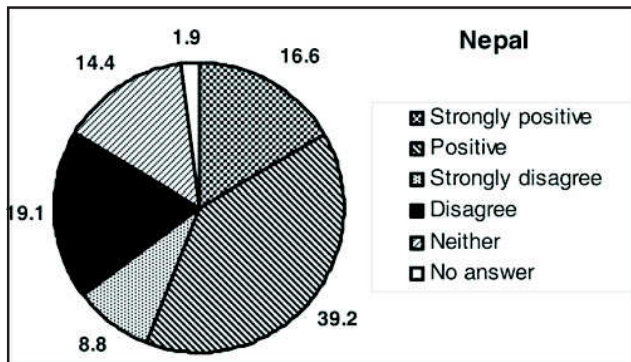


Fig. 1. Nepalese mother's thoughts about their pregnancy

Newar, Rai/Limbu), Dalits (the Hindu lower caste untouchable people who are socially excluded and most of them are illiterate and live in poverty) and Madheshi (people living in Terai or plain areas bordering to India) accounted for 39.4% (n=142), 8.3% (n=30) and 3.3% (n=12), respectively.

The results were analyzed using SPSS (Version 11.0J) and significance differences were expressed in terms of "P value". Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated for the correlation between comparable items. Factor analysis was done to examine the reliability and validity of the scale used. Analysis showed that the cumulative contribution ratio of 70% with the factor structure similar to that of Japanese women. Informed consent was taken from each of the subjects enrolled in the study.

### RESULTS

Of the total 360 mothers of different ethnic groups included in this study, only 55.5% (200/360) mothers were found to have a positive feeling regarding their pregnancy (pregnancy as wonderful event for women) (strongly positive 16.6%; positive 39.2%). Over one-fourth of the mothers (27.7%) had negative feelings (strongly negative 8.8%; negative = 19.0%) and 14.4% had neither positive nor negative feeling (Fig. 1). Among the different ethnic groups, Lama (Tamang/Sherpa) (one of the ethnic group amongst the indigenous nationalities) had highest rate (nearly two-third) of positive feeling towards pregnancy (Fig. 2).

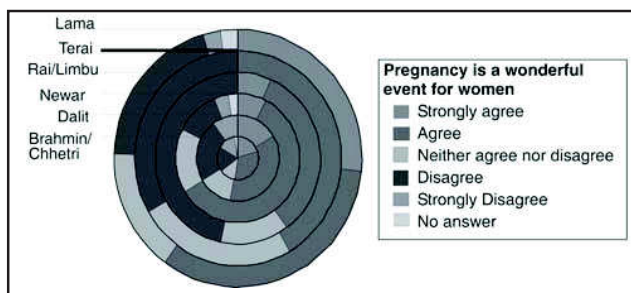


Fig. 2. Positive feeling towards the pregnancy among Nepalese mothers

The positive feeling towards born baby was very high (77.8%; 280/360) among Nepalese mothers (Fig. 3). However, the level of feeling of love to their baby varied among different ethnic groups. Compared with other ethnic groups of study population, Dalits had higher level of positive feelings about giving a child birth, childcare and self-sacrifice for the shake of children. Significantly high number of Brahmin (Hindu upper caste and most of them are well-off people) (>90.0%) considered married life for enjoyment rather than for having children whereas only 70.0% Dalits (Hindu lower caste and untouchable people who are socially excluded and most of them live in poverty) agreed with it (P<0.008). Similarly, significantly high level (23.3%) of feeling of self scarification for the own children was observed among Dalits compared with Brahmins (12.4%) (P<0.003).

### DISCUSSION

Present study revealed that slightly more than half (55.5%) of the Nepalese mothers were found to have a positive feeling regarding their pregnancy (pregnancy as wonderful event for women) (strongly positive 16.6%; positive 39.2%). This was lower than observed among the Japanese mothers (Fig. 4). This might be due to the difference in the age of marriage and being pregnant, level of education and awareness that bring a lot of difference in the perception of an individual to a particular matter. Still, Nepalese women get married quite early and become pregnant much earlier than the Japanese women. Nepalese women, therefore, do not have full understanding of pregnancy and motherhood. However, most of the teenaged mother in UK reportedly had very positive attitudes in being a mother and what that meant to them though they had not planned their pregnancy and felt an immediate bonding relationship when the baby was born.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, contrary to the negative comments,<sup>11</sup> the experiences of the young mothers were positive and adaptive. Difference has been reported even among the educated women conceived by in vitro fertilization (IVF) and those conceived

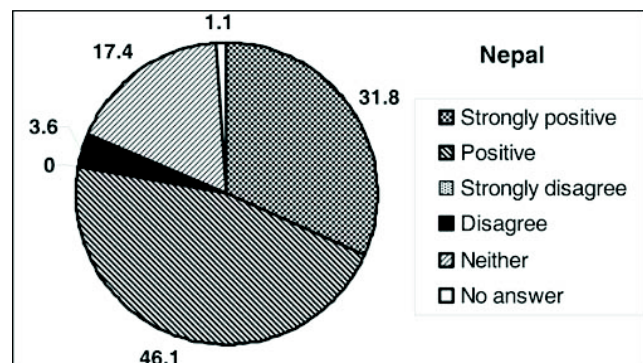


Fig. 3. Positive feelings of Nepalese mothers towards their born baby.

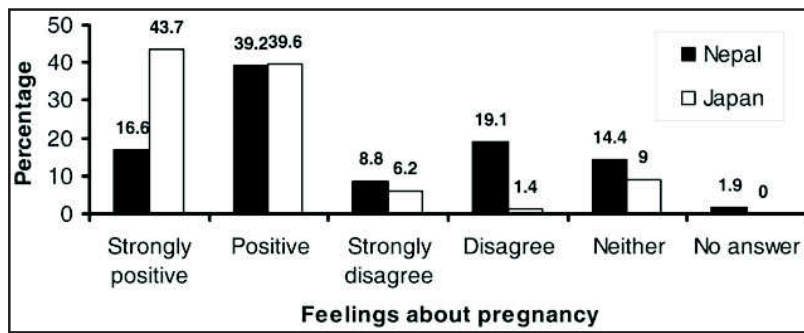


Fig. 4. Comparison of thoughts of Nepalese and Japanese mothers about their pregnancy

naturally.<sup>12</sup> According to this latest report, women who conceived by IVF experienced more positive moods during pregnancy than did the controls (conceived naturally). Furthermore, compared with controls, the IVF group also scored lower on negative affect and higher on measures of positive mood regarding self, baby and spouse.

In this study, among the different ethnic groups, *Lama* (*Tamang/Sherpa*) ethnic had highest rate (nearly two-third) of positive feeling towards pregnancy. *Lamas* follow Buddhism. We could not find any reason why only this ethnic group had highest positive feeling towards pregnancy compared with other ethnic groups included in the study.

Though slightly more than half of the mothers had the positive feeling about their pregnancy, the level of feeling of love for their born baby was very high. This might be due to the experience of labor and seeing of newborn baby. Having a baby is a powerful experience that, according to attachment theory, should activate the attachment system and elicit attachment needs and motives.<sup>13</sup> A positive relationship between attachment in the third trimester and demonstration of affectionate behaviors towards the infant after birth has also been reported.<sup>14</sup> Infant massage by the mother, popular in many cultures, especially India, and is growing in popularity in the western world may attribute to the learning to understand their babies' cues and the release of oxytocin.<sup>15</sup> Infant massage by the mothers, a popular practice in Nepal as well, might have attributed to high level of feeling of love for their born baby. As shown in Fig. 4, compared with Nepalese women, Japanese women have strong positive feeling about their pregnancy as they get married late and also they can see images of their growing baby on ultrasound screen. Except few women in bigger cities, most Nepalese mothers can see their baby only after the giving birth as there is no ultrasound imaging facility. Ultrasound screen image of a baby reportedly acts as a powerful influencing factor on subsequent clinical and ethical decision-

making about the pregnancy.<sup>16</sup> Though, not looked into in this study, study conducted elsewhere has revealed that the perception of the birth experience has a significantly positive relationship with later maternal behaviors among the teenage group but not among the 30- to 42-year-old mothers.<sup>17</sup> Development and growth of the babies taken care by the mothers for more than 16 hours in a day was significantly better compared with those taken care for less than 16 hours.<sup>4</sup>

The level of feeling of love to their baby was different in different Nepalese ethnic groups. Compared with other population groups, *Dalits* had higher level of positive feelings about giving a child birth, childcare and self-sacrifice for the shake of children. Significantly high number of *Brahmin* (*Hindu* upper caste and most of them are well-off people) considered married life for enjoyment rather than for having children compared with *Dalits* (*Hindu* lower caste and untouchable people who are socially excluded and most of them live in poverty). Similarly, significantly high level of feeling of self-sacrificing for the own children was observed among *Dalits* compared with *Brahmins*. The reason why, the *Dalits* had higher level of positive feelings is not very much clear. This, however, might be associated with the length of separation of mother and infant; less separation was associated with greater attachment<sup>18</sup> and *Dalits* mothers in Nepal, compared with others, have relatively shorter length of separation with their infants.

Difference in the feelings about the pregnancy can also be seen among the pregnant women of different level of maternal consciousness. For instance, as mentioned earlier, over two-fifth of Japanese mothers have strong positive feelings compared to Nepalese mothers. Study conducted among Thai immigrants in Australia has shown that cultural beliefs and practices have an effect on women's perceptions and experience of motherhood; also the 'presence' of the husband when a woman becomes a mother is important and the ethnicity of their husbands also played a significant role in their motherhood role and the ways in which they mothered their children.<sup>19</sup>

Present study showed variable results with regard to the various aspects of maternal consciousness among Nepalese mothers and were different from that of Japanese mothers. Interestingly the positive feeling was significantly strong among mothers of lower caste *Dalit* group compared with high caste *Brahmin/Chhetri* and indigenous nationalities (*Adibashi Janajati*) and remains to be the field of further study with the inclusion of larger study population size.

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