



Study on Traditional Beliefs and Practices regarding Maternal and Child Health in Yunnan, Guizhou, Qinghai and Tibet

Research Team of Minzu University of China
April 2010

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Executive Summary



Grand mother, mother and child in Gyamda Hospital, Tibet

Background

With the support of the Spanish Millennium Fund, the UN Joint Programme, China Culture and Development Partnership Framework (2009 – 2011) was launched in April 2009. Within this overall framework, a component of the programme aims to accelerate the achievement of health targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Ministry of Health, National Population and Family Planning Commission, UNICEF, WHO and UNFPA are collaborating to develop an innovative approach to health care and service provision among ethnic minorities in South West China. The project is led by MOH and UNICEF.

Two complementary studies addressing different aspects of maternal and child health were conducted as part of the health component of the project. The first of these was a baseline survey looking at MCH status and service delivery in pilot sites. This was conducted by the National Centre for Women and Children Health in collaboration with the China Population Development and Research Centre, with UNICEF and UNFPA support. The purpose of the quantitative survey was to collect baseline data with which to evaluate overall achievements at the end of the project cycle.

The second study was a piece of qualitative research, conducted by Minzu University of China with UNFPA support. This study was designed to identify and document beliefs and practices in relation to maternal and child health, and health seeking behavior, among six ethnic minorities, and to recommend culturally appropriate interventions to assist in accelerating the achievement of MDG health targets. This report, entitled Traditional Beliefs and Practices regarding Maternal and Child Health in Yunnan, Guizhou, Qinghai and Tibet, is the outcome of that research.

The study was undertaken in the provinces of Guizhou, Yunnan, Qinghai and Tibet and considered the cultural beliefs and practices of selected representatives of six ethnic minority groups - Miao, Dong, Jingpo, Dai, Hui and Tibetans - in relation to key aspects of maternal and child health. It was designed to identify enabling factors that contribute to the uptake of MCH services, as well as any harmful traditional practices or other barriers that impede maternal and child health and utilisation of related services. Information was gathered in relation to religious and traditional beliefs and practices in general, as well attitudes, beliefs and practices in relation to health and nutrition of pregnant women and children. The research team was tasked to identify and highlight

specific practices, beliefs or attitudes – from either demand or supply side - which could be targeted in MCH guidelines, policy and service delivery, in order to enhance access to and utilization of MCH services, thus contributing to improved health targets.

Methodology

A team of researchers from Minzu University of China, worked in close collaboration with selected researchers from the Guizhou University for Nationalities, the Qinghai University for Nationalities, the Yunnan Universities for Nationalities, Finance and Economics, and Science and Technologies, and with the Academy of Tibetan Arts and the Health Centre of Gyamda County. To ensure good understanding of the language and cultural references, each of the six teams included a researcher of the ethnic minority group being studied, with the exception of the Dai. The team leaders conducted 2 day training courses in use of the methodology and survey tools, in each of the capitals of the target provinces. Field work was conducted from June to August 2009.

Three main methods were used to carry out the research: focus group discussions, in-depth interviews

and direct observation. Questionnaires were designed to help guide the FGDs and key-informants interviews.

Guiding questions targeting the ethnic minority respondents addressed the following broad areas: religious and/or traditional beliefs and practices; beliefs and practices in relation to specific aspects of maternal and child health; gender relations and decision making behavior; perceptions of health service provision and providers. Those interviewed included community and religious leaders; traditional medical practitioners and those assisting as deliveries; pregnant women, mothers and guardians of children; young people (aged 15 to 24) with or without children.

Guiding questions targeting local government leaders and MCH service providers addressed perceptions of religious and/or traditional beliefs and practices, and the ways in which they impact on health seeking behaviour; and specific beliefs and practices in relation to maternal health.

The researchers also took whatever opportunities arose during the research period to directly observe traditional practices. Research was conducted in the following sites:

Province	Guizhou	Guizhou	Yunnan	Yunnan	Qinghai	Tibet
County	Leishan	Congjiang	Longchuan	Luxi	Hualong	Gyamda
Ethnic group researched	Miao (50 respondents)	Dong (39 respondents)	Jingpo (44 respondents)	Dai (46 respondents)	Hui (38 respondents)	Tibetan (52 respondents)
Survey site	Xinqiao village	Meide village	Nonglong village	Mangbie village	Gongyi village	Jieba village

Key research findings

institutionalized religions with their own systems and practices. Despite changing lifestyles and standards of

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