

Health seeking behaviour of mothers of under-five-year old children in the slum communities of Nairobi, Kenya.

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Abstract:

Prompt and appropriate health seeking is critical in the management of childhood illnesses. This paper examines the health seeking behaviour in under-five child morbidity. It explores in detail actions taken by 28 mothers when their children become sick. Sixty-two in-depth interviews with mothers were conducted from four study communities. The mothers were identified from a demographic surveillance system. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. The study shows that mothers classify childhood illnesses into four main categories: (1) not serious—coughs, colds, diarrhoea; (2) serious but not life-threatening—malaria; (3) sudden and serious—pneumonia; and (4) chronic and therefore not requiring immediate action—malnutrition, tuberculosis, chronic coughs. This classification is reflected in the actions taken and time it takes to act. Shops are used as the first source of healthcare, and when the care moves out of the home, private health facilities are used more compared to public health facilities, while even fewer mothers consult traditional healers. Consequently we conclude that there is a need to train mothers to recognize potentially life-threatening conditions and to seek appropriate treatment promptly. Drug vendors should be involved in intervention programs because they reach many mothers at the critical time of health seeking.