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Impact of maternal employment on childhood mortality in Swaziland.

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Maternal employment has been highlighted in numerous studies as an important determinant of childhood mortality but in contexts which do not have regional significance to Swaziland. Studies such as those conducted in India (Sivakami, 1997) and China (Short et al. 2002) considered maternal employment as an important predictor of childhood mortality. Childhood mortality is still high in Swaziland and with increasing poverty and disease the under-five mortality rate continues to increase. The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between maternal employment and childhood mortality in Swaziland.

Methodology: the Swaziland Demographic and Household Survey (SDHS) conducted in 2006/7 interviewed 4,987 women. Due to the nature of this study, only women who had given birth to at least one child five years preceding the SDHS 2006/7 interviews were included. The sample size used for the study was of 2,136 mothers. Main conclusions of the study were drawn based on the use of a binary logistic regression model in the multivariate section. With the use of a conceptual framework adapted from the classic theoretical model developed by Mosley and Chen (1984) key variables were identified as determinants of childhood mortality. Use of the STATA 11 software was employed to obtain the results.

Results: results showed 58.88 percent unemployment rate amongst mothers in Swaziland. The main results showed mother's employment as having an adverse impact on childhood mortality. Bivariate results showed that mothers who were employed experienced higher childhood mortality and the adjusted regression model showed mothers who work have a 38 percent increased likelihood of childhood mortality compared to mothers who do not work. Maternal education also showed its importance as a predictor of childhood mortality; the higher the level of maternal education the less chances mothers have of experiencing childhood mortality. Maternal age also demonstrated significance as mothers ages increase so too do the chances of childhood deaths. Other significant factors include number of household members, the number of children born as well as breastfeeding duration.

Conclusion: The results confirmed the alternative hypothesis to be true which states that mothers who work experience significantly higher childhood mortality in Swaziland. The study also highlighted that in contemporary society, child rearing and maternal employment are incompatible and need to re-evaluate policy concerning this matter is essential to better childhood survival.