Access to Health Care for Under-five Children of Migrant Laborer Settlements in Ernakulam District, Kerala, Southern India: A Mixed Method Study

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Abstract

Background: Internal migration is on rise in India. It is necessary to understand the current health status and healthcare access for under-five migrant children to develop migrant-sensitive strategies for improving child health. **Objectives:** This study aimed to study the health profile and access to health care for children under 5 years of age in the migrant community in Ernakulum district, Kerala. **Materials and Methods:** A community-based cross-sectional survey was conducted among 165 under-five migrant children selected through a multistage cluster sampling method. Interviews were conducted among their parents. Sixteen in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted among various stakeholders. **Results:** Within 2 weeks before the survey, 7% of under-five migrant children had diarrhea, of which 50% received oral rehydration solution; 33.3% had symptoms of acute respiratory infection (ARI), of which 61% accessed a health facility. Among them, 12% had severe wasting. For the last episode of illness, 73% consulted a modern medicine practitioner. IDIs revealed that working hours of health centers do not aligning with migrants' working hours' schedules, difficulty in communication due to language issues, and indirect costs in the form of loss of wages emerged as major barriers for them to access health care. **Conclusion:** Migrants face many issues to access child healthcare services. There is a need for primary healthcare services to be made more "migrant-friendly" with flexible timings and ensuring availability of interpreters who could handle multiple languages. The primary healthcare system needs to prioritize prevention and control of common ailments among migrant children such as undernutrition, diarrhea, and ARI.

Key words: Accessibility, migrant-friendly, migrant-sensitive, service delivery, under-nutrition, universal health coverage, utilization of services