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BINA GUBHAJU: WOMEN'S STATUS, HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE AND THE UTILIZATION OF MATERNAL HEALTH SERVICES IN NEPAL. THESIS ADVISORS: MASAKI MATSUMURA, Ph.D., RAMON SEVILLA, Ph.D., 69 P. ISBN 974-664-638-9

Nepal has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in South Asia. One of the reasons for such a high mortality may be attributed to the under-utilization of modern maternal health services during pregnancy. This study has analyzed the relationship between women's status, household structure and the utilization of maternal health services in order to explore some possible reasons for the under-utilization of the services. Data from the Nepal Family Health Survey, 1996 was used for the study. A total sample of 1,388 women who had a pregnancy in the year prior to the interview was selected.

In Nepal, relatively few women use maternal health services such as prenatal care, skilled assistance during delivery, and postnatal care. Even when the services are nearby, women are reluctant to seek care during pregnancy. Logistic regression was used to assess the net effect of several independent variables, related to women's status and household structure, on four dependent variables of maternal health care. The analysis revealed that several independent variables related to women's status such as education, occupation and decision making in the household were statistically significantly related to an individual's decision to seek care. Furthermore, household characteristics such as the structure of the family, sex of the household head and economic status of the household significantly influenced utilization behaviour.

The results of the study indicate that education, a key indicator of women's status plays a major role in women's decision making to seek care during pregnancy. Thus, it can be suggested that providing education for women in Nepal is imperative to bring about changes in women's health. In addition, employment of women in the agricultural sector perpetuates the low status of women. In order to improve maternal health in Nepal, efforts must be made towards increasing the status of women. Women from households of poor economic status and nuclear households are especially vulnerable. Therefore, programs to advocate the importance of maternal health care should specifically target the most vulnerable groups.