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PP 28 - Exploration of Mothers' Experiences with Very Premature Babies in Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Teaching Hospital Kandy

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Background: Babies born before completing 37 weeks of pregnancy are called as premature babies. Among them babies born between 28 – 32 weeks of pregnancy are categorized as very premature babies. Premature births and their admissions to Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) are considered as a time of crisis for every mother. New mothers are rarely prepared for the shock, tension, anxiety as well as behavioural changes and social experiences caused by premature birth and their hospitalization.

Objectives: To explore mothers' experiences with very premature babies in NICU at Teaching Hospital Kandy.

Methodology: This phenomenological study was conducted with purposive sample of 15 mothers of very premature babies at NICU, Teaching Hospital Kandy during the period of March to April, 2018. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain in-depth information and Colaizzi's analytical framework was used for analysis. Ethical clearance was obtained from ethical review committee, Teaching Hospital, Kandy.

Results and conclusions: Five themes were emerged from data, namely emotional stress, family support, social isolation, interaction with others and adaptation. Due to separation from babies, hopeless situation, fear and sadness about baby's condition and attitudes regarding baby's recovery leads to emotional stress. Social isolation caused by long term hospitalization and separation from families and loved once also leads to emotional stress. Effective and supportive communication with health professionals leads to positive interactions. Early provision of information regarding premature deliveries and previous experiences helped to adapt to the new situation. Premature birth and NICU admissions are the most important determinant of adverse outcomes in quality of life of mothers. Further, mothers experiences are affected by emotional stress, family support, social isolation, interaction with others and adaptation to the situation. Hence, coping strategies should be introduced to mothers to minimize the stress level and provide family centered, supportive care with therapeutic relationship.

Keywords: Mothers' experiences, neonatal intensive care unit, premature babies