ABSTRACT

A descriptive study was conducted to assess maternal and child care practices that are related to the nutritional status of under-five year old children in Banpong hospital, Ratchaburi Province, Thailand.

Two hundred mothers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire from 14th-30th of January 2002. The information collected included socio-demographic characteristics, maternal and child care practices and anthropometric measurements of mothers and children. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics, Chi-square, Mann-Whitney U-test and nonparametric correlation (Spearman).

The prevalence of malnutrition in children was 19% by weight for age (13.5% first degree, 3.5% second degree and 2% third degree), 23% by height for age (12.5% first degree, 7% second degree and 3.5% third degree) and 18.5% by weight for height (8.5% first degree, 6% second degree and 4% third degree). 1.1% of the mothers were moderately malnourished, 9.4% were mildly malnourished and 19.9% were obese.

Completeness of immunisation, food withholding (fruits and juices) during diarrhoea, complementary food, childhood illnesses (diarrhoea and coughing) and food taboos during pregnancy and lactation were significantly associated with child nutritional status on either weight for age, height for age or weight for height basis.

Child nutritional status was significantly and positively correlated with maternal education (p=0.022), family income (p=0.019) and birth weight (p=0.005) by weight for age. However, it was significantly but negatively correlated with child age (p=0.006), duration of breastfeeding (p<0.001) and weaning age (p=0.003) by weight for age and household size (p=0.038) by height for age. Also, maternal education (p=0.034) and family income (p=0.001) were positively correlated to child nutritional status by height for age and birth spacing (p=0.030) by weight for height.

Many factors that were related to maternal and child care practices in this study contributed to malnutrition in children. Therefore, it is recommended that a multi-sectoral approach should be adopted in designing programmes that are aimed at alleviating childhood malnutrition such as community-based growth monitoring and nutritional education. Emphasis should be put on breastfeeding and complementary feeding because they were found to be poorly practiced.