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Assessing Maternal Knowledge of Newborn Danger Signs and Optimal Breast Feeding Practices in Kumasi, Ghana

### **Abstract**

**Introduction:** Each year, nearly 2,600 neonates born at Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH) die before reaching their eighth day of life. These deaths are primarily a result of preventable causes such as oxygen deprivation, prematurity, and infection. Early recognition of newborn health risks by immediate caregivers is essential to reducing the number of neonatal deaths due to treatable causes. This study aims to assess maternal knowledge of newborn health risks and optimal breast feeding practices at KATH in Kumasi, Ghana.

**Methods:** This study included pregnant mothers at any gestational age and mothers who delivered within 2 weeks. Participants were asked about socio-demographic characteristics, pregnancy history, current pregnancy complications, and breast feeding plans. A free recall method was used to assess knowledge of newborn danger signs.

**Results:** Despite common identification of key danger signs, 70.6% of mothers were only able to name 3 or fewer signs. "Fever" was most commonly named and was referred to by 70.6% of mothers. Though 60.7% of mothers planned to exclusively breast feed, only 34.2% reported plans to practice optimal breast feeding (i.e. a combination of 6 months of exclusive breastfeeding and up to 24 months of complementary feeding).

**Conclusion:** There is a significant gap in maternal knowledge of newborn health risks at KATH. Additionally, mothers have misconceptions about exclusive breast feeding and few mothers have plans to follow optimal breastfeeding practices. Future investigations should focus on developing effective maternal educational tools to aid in preemptive identification and treatment of neonatal health risks.