

ABSTRACT

Promoting child health and improving accessibility to health services can prevent further problems and improve the quality of life for children. The preference of one health care provider over another will be affected not only by facility characteristics such as quality of service and cost of service, but also by the individual characteristics. This cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted in 4 randomly selected wards of Tharkayta between September and October, 2010 to identify mothers/caretakers' treatment seeking pattern for illnesses experienced within past 6 months, determinants of choices, their awareness, and perceptions towards common illnesses in under-five children, and their satisfaction towards health care services utilized.

Altogether 172 mothers/caretakers of under-five children were interviewed. Their median age was 31 years and 34.9 percent had high school level education and above. Twenty-five percent did not seek any help for minor illnesses in under-five children within past six months. But for perceived major symptoms at risk, 23.3 percent self-medicated first prior to visiting health facilities and 51.7 percent immediately visited either public or private health facilities.

They knew that high fever (67.4 percent) followed by drowsiness (25.6 percent) as severe symptoms alarmed for immediate care. Diarrhoea, acute respiratory tract infections and dengue contributed for 76.6 percent of major episodes being sought for health care. Over 80 percent perceived as best to choose antibiotics and analgesics on the first day of illness especially for neonates and infants.

Those who were aware of more than two health care facilities for easy access (55.3 percent) selected to visit health care facilities immediately for perceived danger signs in their children regardless of affordability. Majority showed high level of satisfaction towards quality of care in both public and private health facilities.

In conclusion, there was a knowledge to action gap between recognition of danger symptoms and seeking care within 24 hours. So it is recommended to give education to mothers at immunization sessions and under-five clinics in Tharkayta Township because timely health seeking for severe symptoms required to improve risk perceptions to make appropriate choices between self-medication and health care providers.