

Original

**ANTENATAL CARE AND RISK ASSESSMENT IN A WORKING
PRIMARY HEALTH CARE CLINIC: A CRITICAL LOOK**

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Visits to antenatal clinics are meant to detect, prevent or manage abnormalities in early pregnancy and prepare mothers for safe deliveries. Risk assessment, using risk scores, is one of the tools used for this purpose. This study describes the working procedure and the services delivered in a working clinic in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, analyses antenatal visits and describes various aspects of the process of risk assessment.

A total of 280 mothers made 1,007 clinic visits in 1991, a mean of 3.6 visits per mother. Attendance for the first visit was relatively late in pregnancy. One-third of all mothers were seen only once or twice in this clinic. Two-thirds of the expected delivery dates were mistaken by a difference of up to 4 weeks. The service lacked many important functions such as nutritional advice and proper health education. Feedback from the hospital was insufficient to judge the effect of risk assessment. Scores used for various pregnancy conditions were criticised for their subjective risk weight with regard to the Arabic pattern of pregnancy and delivery. It is recommended that antenatal care should be restructured according to the available resources of health centres in the community. Clear working protocols for these clinics, a two-way referral system, better training of the service provider and a review of risk scores are some of the recommendations.

Antenatal visits are an important part of maternal care practised at Primary Health Care (PHC) centres. Screening of pregnant mothers at the first antenatal visit by taking the medical history, a clinical examination and doing a simple investigation is the first and the main service provided to women in order to plan the obstetric follow-up and delivery¹. Other services include vaccination, health education, nutritional assessment, and management of minor pregnancy problems and the preparation of the pregnant mother for the delivery by exercise classes and booking a hospital bed. Assessment of risks is another procedure and is done through the estimation of risk scores using one of the risk score sheets devised for this purpose.