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**AWARENESS ABOUT VITAL EVENTS IN SLUM POPULATION OF AMRITSAR, PUNJAB**

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**ABSTRACT**

In India, the registration of births and deaths is compulsory and mandated under the Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969, which came into force in 1970. Although more than 35 years have passed since the enactment of the legislation, the level of registration is not satisfactory, with large interstate variations. A cross sectional study was conducted in the slums adjoining field practice area of Department of Community Medicine, SGRDIMSAR, Amritsar. The household with an under five were included in the study. By using simple random sampling technique, households with under -5 child were selected & information was collected by interviewing adult member in the family preferably mother. The data was analyzed using SPSS 16.0 version. It was observed that 81.5% respondents had heard about birth registration and only 15.7% respondents were aware about death registration. Little less than half of the respondents (48%) had got birth certificate of children. The awareness level regarding birth registration was found to be more than death registration. However, the respondents possessing the birth certificate were little less than half. So service of vital event registration should be brought closer to communities particularly areas with high rates of unregistered children.

**Key Words:** Awareness, Vital events, Under five, Slums, Punjab

**INTRODUCTION**

Birth and death are the two most fundamental milestones of human lives, and vital statistics on these events are a fundamental element of a national health information system (who-fic information sheet, 2010). Civil Registration System popularly known as Birth and Death Registration System is the recording of vital events under the statutory provisions on continuous & permanent basis (Department of Health and Family Welfare Government of Punjab, 2004). An estimated 40 million births (one third of the world's annual total) and 40 million deaths (two thirds of the world's annual total) are not legally recognized by civil registration systems (Civil registration statistics, 2012)). In India, the registration of births and deaths is compulsory and mandated under the Registration of Births and Deaths (RBD) Act, 1969, which came into force in 1970. Moreover, being a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), India has committed itself to ensuring universal birth registration and this commitment is reflected in several national policies, such as the National Population Policy, 2000, and the National Plan of Action for Children, 2005 (UNICEF, 2011). Although more than 35 years have passed since the enactment of the legislation, the level of registration is not satisfactory, with large interstate variations. An estimated 26 million births and about 9 million deaths take place in the country every year. Together, approximately 35 million vital events have to be registered every year. The current registration level of births and deaths in the country is about 58% for births and 54% for deaths. Each year about 42% of births go unregistered, which is about 10 million births (UNICEF, No Date). According to NFHS -3, nationally, 41% children under the age five years have had their births registered with the civil authorities. However, only 27% children under the age five years have a birth certificate (India country report, 2010) . These unregistered children are almost always from poor, socially excluded or displaced families, and often have illiterate parents. Few studies have been conducted in slum population to

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determine the awareness level of registration of vital events .So this study was planned to determine the awareness level of registration of births & deaths in slum population of Amritsar.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

A cross sectional study was conducted in a slum population of Amritsar, Punjab. The slums adjoining field practice area of Department of Community Medicine, SGRDIMSAR, Amritsar were listed. The total population was estimated to be approximately 60,000. The household with an under five were included in the study .A pre-tested and self-structured questionnaire was designed. Questionnaire contained information regarding identification, socio-demographic profile, awareness about vital events i.e. births & death registration & possession of birth & death certificates. A pilot study was conducted in 20 households selected randomly in slum area where awareness regarding the registration of vital events was found to be 50%. With this result sample size was calculated using the formula  $4PQ/L^2$  where allowable error was taken to be 10%. Then by using simple random sampling technique, households with under -5 child were selected & information was collected by interviewing adult member in the family preferably mother. The data was analyzed using SPSS 16.0 version.

### **RESULTS**

The study revealed that out of 400 under -5 subjects, 55% were males & 45% were females. Majority of the population were Hindus (91.7%). A little more than half of the population was migrant population (51.7%). Mean age of the father and mother was found to be 28.7 and 25.9 years respectively. In the study area, 58.7 % fathers of the subject were illiterates, 25.7 % were below matric, and 15.5 % were educated above matric. In comparison, 69.7% mothers of the subjects were illiterates, 23.7 % were below matric and 6.5% were educated above matric.

Mainly fathers of the study subjects were engaged as labourers (67%), while 29.2% were working in private job & 3.7% were unemployed. Majority of mothers of the children were housewives (92.7% ) and only (7.2%) were working.

In the study it was observed that 81.5% respondents had heard about birth registration (Table 1) .The main source of information was cited as health workers (40.3%) followed by relatives (30%), neighbours (8.2%) and media (3%). 76.4% respondents had no idea whether birth registration & birth certificates are synonymous whereas 17.7% had incorrect opinion about birth registration & certificate being synonymous. Half (56.5%) of the respondents felt that birth registration is compulsory while 39% believed that it is compulsory to name the child first & then get registration done. Less than half (46%) of the respondents were aware that there is a defined time limit for getting births registered. Only 24.5% respondents correctly mentioned 21 days as time limit for getting births registered. Majority (75.4%) had no idea whether births can be registered after fixed time period.

Half of the respondents (58%) were aware about the place where births can be registered while 36.3% of the respondents had no idea about the place .Out of those who were aware about place of registration, only 10.9% mentioned correctly that municipal corporation is the place where registration can be done whereas most of the respondents ( 45.3%) cited hospital as the place of birth registration. More than half (52%) of the respondents opined that fees is required for registration of births where as 18.9% felt that it is free. The main use given for birth registration was for educational purpose (75%), followed by ration card (14%), as legal document (6%) and marriage (5%).

Table 1 shows that out of total respondents 48% had got birth certificate of their children as checked by the interviewer.

It was observed that 15.7 % respondents were aware about death registration as shown in Table 1 .Death was reported in 13.5% families of the respondents in the last one year. Out of reported deaths 8.7% were male deaths & 4.5% were female deaths. Out of this only 5 % had got death registered (Table 1). The place of registration was stated as Court (3%), Municipal Corporation (1%), and Hospital (1%) by the respondents.

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**Table 1: Response of Subjects Regarding Following Statements**

Statements	Response of Respondents		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
Heard about birth registration	326 (81.5%)	23 (5.7%)	51 (12.7%)
Heard about death registration	63 (15.7 %)	282(70.5%)	55 (13.7%)
Respondents who had got birth certificate of child	192 (48 %)	208 (52%)	-
Respondents who reported death in last one year	54 (13.5% )	346 (86.5 %)	-
Respondents who had got death certificate of deceased	20 (5%)	34 (8.5%)	-

Awareness levels about registration were observed to increase with increase in education level of both father & mother as shown in Table 2. Also native population have better awareness level than migrant population. Occupation of father affected the awareness levels regarding birth registration but not the occupation of mother. This may be because mainly the father plays decision making role in the family. It was observed that children with more educated mothers and fathers are more likely to have their birth registered and possess birth certificates (Table 3).

**Table 2: Relation of awareness levels of respondents about birth registration with various socio-demographic factors**

			Response of respondents		
			Yes	No	Don't Know
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	Father	168	18	49
		Mother	205	22	52
	Less than matric	Father	95	5	3
		Mother	87	5	3
	Matric & above	Father	57	2	3
		Mother	21	3	2
Significance	Father	Chi - square = 27, df = 4 P<0.001, highly significant			
	Mother	Chi - square = 17, df =4 P <0.001, highly significant			
<b>Migration</b>	Native		154	13	41
	Migrant		170	10	12
	Significance		Chi- square = 16.433, df =2, p < 0.000, highly significant		
<b>Occupation Father</b>	Labourer		216	17	35
	Private job & others		97	5	15
	Unemployed		5	4	6
Significance		Chi - square = 22, df =4, p<0.001, highly significant			
<b>Occupation Mother</b>	Housewife		302	19	49
	Working		22	4	4
	Significance		Chi -square = 3.525, df = 2, p >0.05, non significant		

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**Table 3: Possession of birth certificate in relation to various socio-demographic factors**

			Possession of Birth Certificate	
			Yes	No
<b>Education</b>	Illiterate	Father	96	138
		Mother	112	167
	Less than matric	Father	63	40
		Mother	59	36
	Matric & above	Father	32	31
		Mother	19	7
	Significance	Father	Chi - square = 11.9, df = 2 ,p<0.001, highly significant	
		Mother	Chi -square = 18, df = 2 ,p<0.001, highly significant	
<b>Migration</b>	Migrant		83	125
	Native		109	83
	Significance		Chi -square = 11.3,df =1, p< 0.001, highly significant	
<b>Occupation</b>	Labourer		126	140
	Private job & others		61	64
	Unemployed		5	4
<b>Father</b>	Significance		Chi - square = 0.27, df= 2 ,p>0.05, nonsignificant	
<b>Occupation</b>	Housewife		177	194
	Working		15	14
<b>Mother</b>	Significance		Chi -square = .065, df = 1 ,p>0.05, nonsignificant	

**DISCUSSION**

The study was a cross – sectional study conducted in the slum population. The study area comprised of almost equal number of migratory & native population. The study revealed that illiteracy was found to be more among females than males comparatively. The fathers of the study subjects were mainly labourers while mothers were housewives. Awareness regarding birth registration was found to be on higher (81.5%) side as compared for death registration (13.5%).The results are comparable to a study conducted by Akande & Sekoni (2005) in Nigeria.

The main source of information was mainly health personnel followed by relatives. Surprisingly media contributed minimally in creating awareness regarding registration. So efforts should be made to raise awareness regarding registration about vital events by using street theatre as large proportion of population was illiterate.

Majority of the respondents had no knowledge whether birth registration & birth certificate are synonymous terms.

Half of the respondents had idea about the place of birth registration. Hospital was mentioned by majority as the place of registration. This may be because for the events occurring in the institution within the premises of hospital & a copy of free birth certificate under section 12,of RBD Act(1969)

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India, is immediately provided to attendant of woman who has delivered a child before being discharged from hospital (Registration of births & deaths, no date). So keeping this in view, to increase registration of births, deliveries should be encouraged by skilled health personnel.

Only half of the respondents were of the view that birth registration is compulsory while 38.1% felt child should be named first & then registered. This could be because cultural & social practices play important roles in the lives of people in India. Parents may prefer to hold a naming ceremony or traditional rite of passage that takes precedence over formal registration.

Lacunae were observed regarding correct time limit for birth registration among respondents. Less than one fourth of the respondents, mentioned 21 days as the correct time limit for getting births registered. More than half of the respondents felt that registration involves cost. While in another study conducted among slum population around 13.3% believed that registration involves cost (Gupta *et al.*, 2009)

In our study 48% respondents had birth certificate for the under 5 child in the family. The data from National Family Health Survey- 3 (2005-2006) reveals that only around 27 per cent of the children possess birth certificates (India country report, 2010). According to DRGSRs, in Punjab registration levels for births & deaths are 92.2% and 82.5% respectively (Serrao and Sujatha, 2004). This could be because our study was conducted in slum area where half of the population was migrant population. Also parents often do not have the right information & do not understand the possible consequences of not registering their child.

Awareness regarding death registration was found to be on less. Only 13.2 % of the respondents reported deaths in the family. Registration for death was done by only 5% of the respondents. The findings are similar to another study conducted in Nigeria where both awareness levels regarding registration of deaths & getting death registered were on lower side (Akande and Sekoni, 2005).

### **Conclusions**

Birth registration is the state's first official acknowledgement of the child's existence & is the means to secure other child rights such as access to health care & education. Though awareness level regarding birth registration was found to be more than death registration. However, the respondents possessing the birth certificate were little less than half. Marginalised population often go unregistered even in countries close to 100% registration.

So to achieve the target of 100% registration of vital events, mobile registration can be one of the options. The service should be brought closer to communities, particularly areas with high rates of unregistered children. To create awareness among general public about the importance of timely registration of births & deaths & utility of birth & death certificate, regular IEC activities should be conducted. Birth registration can be linked with immunisation programme like UIP, IPPI campaign. NGO can help in registering vulnerable & hard to reach children. Interactive popular theatre can also be used to raise awareness among population especially where large proportion is composed of illiterate population especially in slum areas.

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