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Review Article

Comparative Study to Assess Mothers' Perception and Satisfaction Regarding Care of Neonates in Mother Newborn Care Unit and Newborn Intensive Care Unit at a Tertiary Level Facility: A Review Article

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A B S T R A C T

Mother-centered neonatal care has emerged as a crucial component of quality healthcare delivery, particularly in specialized units such as Mother Newborn Care Units (MNCUs) and Newborn Intensive Care Units (NICUs). Mothers' perception and satisfaction with neonatal care significantly influence healthcare utilization, bonding, breastfeeding practices, and overall neonatal outcomes. This review article aims to analyze and compare existing literature on mothers' perception and satisfaction regarding neonatal care provided in MNCUs and NICUs at tertiary-level healthcare facilities. Key domains reviewed include quality of care, communication, emotional support, infrastructure, involvement in care, and staff behavior. Findings from national and international studies suggest that while NICUs offer advanced life-saving care, MNCUs often provide better maternal involvement and satisfaction due to family-centered practices. Understanding these differences is essential for improving neonatal services and promoting holistic mother–newborn care.

Keywords: Mother Newborn Care Unit, Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Mothers' Perception, Satisfaction, Neonatal Care, Tertiary Care

Introduction

Neonatal care plays a vital role in reducing neonatal morbidity and mortality, especially during the first 28 days of life. Globally, advances in neonatal medicine have led to the establishment of specialized care units such as Mother Newborn Care Units (MNCUs) and Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs), particularly in tertiary-level healthcare settings. While clinical outcomes remain a priority, mothers' perception and satisfaction with neonatal care have gained increasing importance as indicators of healthcare quality.

Maternal satisfaction reflects the extent to which healthcare services meet mothers' expectations, emotional needs, and cultural values. It also affects maternal confidence, bonding with the newborn, and adherence to follow-up care. Hence, assessing and comparing mothers' perception and satisfaction across different neonatal care settings is essential for improving service delivery.[1,2]

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Concept of Mothers' Perception and Satisfaction

Perception refers to mothers' understanding and interpretation of the care provided to their neonates, influenced by personal experiences, expectations, communication, and emotional support.[3] It shapes how mothers view the healthcare environment, the attitudes and competence of healthcare providers, and the overall care process. Satisfaction, on the other hand, is the degree to which mothers feel content with the quality, accessibility, and outcomes of care, and it reflects whether the services received meet or exceed their expectations.[3] Maternal satisfaction is considered an important indicator of quality of neonatal care and is closely linked to adherence to care practices, utilization of services, and trust in the healthcare system.

Key factors influencing maternal perception and satisfaction include

- Quality of nursing and medical care, including competence, responsiveness, and continuity of care
- Effective communication with healthcare providers, such as clarity of information, regular updates, and approachability
- Emotional and psychological support, especially during periods of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty
- Cleanliness, safety, and adequacy of infrastructure and facilities
- Involvement of mothers in newborn care, promoting confidence and mother–infant bonding
- Respect, privacy, dignity, and empathy shown by healthcare staff, which enhance trust and comfort

Mother Newborn Care Unit (MNCU)

The Mother Newborn Care Unit (MNCU) is a specialized facility designed to provide comprehensive care to stable and moderately ill newborns while ensuring continuous mother–newborn contact. The primary aim of MNCUs is to promote mother-centric and family-centered care by keeping the mother and newborn together during the postnatal period. This approach facilitates early initiation and continuation of breastfeeding, promotes kangaroo mother care, and encourages active maternal participation in the care of the newborn.[4]

MNCUs play a significant role in improving neonatal outcomes by fostering bonding, reducing neonatal infections, and enhancing maternal confidence in newborn care. The unit provides essential neonatal services such as thermal care, feeding support, monitoring of vital signs, and early detection of complications, while simultaneously addressing the emotional and psychological needs of mothers. By involving mothers directly in routine newborn care practices, MNCUs help reduce maternal anxiety and increase satisfaction with the care provided. Overall, MNCUs serve as an effective model for delivering holistic, compassionate, and quality neonatal care at tertiary-level healthcare facilities.[5,6]

Mothers' Perception of Care in MNCU

Studies indicate that mothers receiving care in Mother Newborn Care Units (MNCUs) generally report positive perceptions regarding the care provided to their newborns. One of the most significant factors influencing maternal perception is the constant proximity to their newborns, which allows mothers to remain physically and emotionally connected throughout the postnatal period. This continuous contact helps reduce maternal anxiety and enhances confidence in caring for the newborn.[7]

Active participation in newborn care is another important aspect positively perceived by mothers in MNCUs. Mothers are encouraged to take part in routine care activities such as feeding, maintaining warmth, hygiene practices, and observation of the newborn's condition. This involvement fosters a sense of responsibility and empowerment, contributing to improved maternal satisfaction.

Improved breastfeeding support is also frequently highlighted in the literature, as MNCUs promote early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding. Healthcare professionals provide guidance and encouragement, which helps mothers overcome feeding difficulties and strengthens maternal confidence. Additionally, better emotional bonding between the mother and newborn is facilitated through uninterrupted contact and supportive care practices, leading to a more positive overall childbirth and postnatal experience[8-10]

Mothers' Satisfaction with MNCU Services

High levels of maternal satisfaction in Mother Newborn Care Units (MNCUs) have been consistently associated with supportive nursing care, clear and effective communication, and respectful treatment by healthcare providers. Mothers value the availability and approachability of nursing staff, who provide timely assistance, guidance, and reassurance during the postnatal period. The consistent presence of caregivers helps mothers feel secure and confident in managing their newborns' needs.

Additionally, reduced anxiety due to continuous mother–baby togetherness plays a crucial role in enhancing satisfaction. The opportunity to remain with their newborns promotes emotional comfort, strengthens maternal confidence, and improves overall acceptance of care. Early initiation and support of breastfeeding, encouragement of kangaroo mother care, and active involvement in routine newborn care further enhance maternal satisfaction by fostering bonding and a sense of competence.

Mothers also report higher satisfaction when they are included in decision-making and receive adequate health education regarding newborn care, danger signs, and follow-up practices. Such family-centered and participatory care models contribute significantly to positive maternal experiences, improved emotional well-being, and sustained trust in healthcare services, leading to higher overall satisfaction with MNCU services.[11,12]

Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)

Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs) are specialized units designed to provide advanced medical and technological care to critically ill and premature neonates. These units are equipped with sophisticated monitoring systems, life-support equipment, and highly trained healthcare professionals to manage complex neonatal conditions. Although NICUs play a vital role in improving neonatal survival rates, the highly technical environment and strict protocols may create emotional challenges for mothers.

Restricted access to the newborn, unfamiliar medical equipment, and uncertainty regarding the infant's condition and outcome often contribute to increased stress and anxiety among mothers. As a result, maternal experiences in NICUs differ significantly from those in mother-centered care settings.[13]

Mothers' Perception of Care in NICU

The literature indicates mixed perceptions among mothers whose newborns are admitted to NICUs. While mothers generally express appreciation for the technical expertise, specialized care, and life-saving interventions provided by healthcare professionals, many also report negative emotional experiences. Common concerns include anxiety and fear related to the newborn's critical condition, limited involvement in caregiving activities, and feelings of helplessness.

Inadequate or inconsistent communication from healthcare providers further contributes to emotional distress, as mothers may struggle to understand their newborn's condition, treatment plan, and prognosis. These factors collectively influence mothers' perception of NICU care and highlight the need for improved communication and family-centered practices within intensive care settings.

Mothers' Satisfaction with NICU Services

Satisfaction levels in NICUs are often influenced by the quality of staff communication, availability of emotional support, visiting policies, and access to counseling services. Mothers tend to report higher satisfaction when healthcare providers offer regular updates, explain procedures clearly, and show empathy toward parental concerns. Supportive nursing care and opportunities for maternal involvement, such as participation in feeding or basic care when feasible, further enhance satisfaction.

However, lack of consistent information, restricted visiting hours, and limited maternal participation in decision-making may reduce overall satisfaction, despite high clinical standards and advanced medical care. These factors emphasize the importance of adopting family-centered approaches to improve maternal satisfaction in NICU settings.

Comparative Analysis of MNCU and NICU

While NICUs excel in clinical care for critically ill neonates, MNCUs demonstrate higher maternal satisfaction due to family-centered approaches (Table 1).

Table 1.Comparative studies reveal distinct differences in maternal perception and satisfaction between MNCUs and NICUs

Aspect	MNCU	NICU
Maternal involvement	High	Limited
Emotional support	Better	Variable
Stress levels	Lower	Higher
Satisfaction	Generally higher	Depends on communication
Technological care	Moderate	Advanced

Role of Nurses in Enhancing Maternal Satisfaction

Nurses play a pivotal role in shaping mothers' experiences in both Mother Newborn Care Units (MNCUs) and Neonatal Intensive Care Units (NICUs). Their actions, attitudes, and communication skills directly influence maternal perception, satisfaction, and confidence in caring for their newborns.

Key nursing interventions include:

- Effective communication and counseling: Nurses provide clear, timely, and empathetic information regarding the neonate's condition, treatment procedures, and expected outcomes. This reduces maternal anxiety, builds trust, and ensures that mothers feel informed and involved in decision-making.
- Encouraging maternal involvement: By allowing mothers to participate in routine care such as feeding, bathing, and monitoring vital signs, nurses promote maternal empowerment, bonding, and confidence in their caregiving abilities.
- Providing emotional reassurance: Nurses offer support, encouragement, and comfort to mothers who may experience stress, fear, or guilt, particularly in NICU settings where infants are critically ill. Emotional support helps mothers cope with the challenges of hospitalization and separation.

- Educating mothers about neonatal condition and care: Structured teaching on neonatal care, danger signs, breastfeeding techniques, and follow-up practices equips mothers with knowledge and skills, enhancing satisfaction and promoting positive neonatal outcomes.
- Creating a supportive and respectful environment: Nurses ensure that mothers are treated with dignity, privacy, and respect, fostering a safe and nurturing atmosphere. This includes listening actively to concerns, addressing questions promptly, and involving families in care decisions whenever possible.

Implications for Nursing Practice and Policy

Improving maternal satisfaction requires integrating family-centered care principles into both MNCUs and NICUs. Policymakers and hospital administrators should focus on:

- Training healthcare staff in communication skills
- Enhancing mother-friendly policies
- Improving infrastructure and privacy
- Strengthening psychosocial support services

Conclusion

Mothers' perception and satisfaction are important indicators of the quality of neonatal care. While NICUs provide essential care for critically ill neonates, MNCUs promote higher maternal satisfaction through continuous mother–infant contact, family-centered care, and emotional support. Integrating advanced clinical interventions with maternal-centered practices, effective communication, and psychosocial support is essential to optimize neonatal outcomes and maternal well-being. Such a balanced approach enhances maternal confidence, strengthens bonding, and improves the overall quality of care in tertiary-level facilities.

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