

Achieving Health Equality by Dissemination of a Maternal and Child Health Handbook

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Abstract

Background: Home-based records (HBRs) are extensively utilized to improve maternal and child health (MCH) in more than 163 countries worldwide. Among the tools for managing health is the Maternal and Child Health Handbook (MCH Handbook). The MCH Handbook can improve MCH in both the physical and mental domains. It is also evident that the MCH Handbook employs diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles to attain health equity. However, it is still uncertain if disseminating an MCH Handbook results in improved health equality. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify if dissemination of a MCH Handbook contributes to the promotion of health equality.

Methods: The research comprised three distinct components. Research 1 is a literature review, focusing on three relevant chapters from “Kotch’s Maternal and Child Health: Problem, Program, and Policy in Public Health (4th edition).” The selected chapters included Chapter 18 “Assessment and Program Planning,” Chapter 21 “Advocacy and Policy Development,” and Chapter 22 “Leadership in Maternal and Child Health.” Additional literature was explored using keywords such as “maternal and child health handbook,” “mother and child handbook,” “maternal health services,” and “record.”

Research 2 involved a case study conducted in Beirut, Lebanon, utilizing the diary method of onsite inspection. The fieldwork took place over 38 days, from August 21st, 2023, to October 12th, 2023. The observation sites included the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Lebanon Office, Halba Governmental Hospital, Al-Iman Primary Healthcare Center, and Ghobeiry Municipality Health Care and Social Center.

Research 3 consisted of an interview conducted on November 10th, 2023, with Professor Yasuhide Nakamura. Eleven questions were posed based on keywords identified from the literature review and the Lebanon case study. These keywords encompassed advocacy, community building, DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), dissemination, health equality, implementation, inappropriately used, leadership, the Little Baby Handbook (LBH), policy development, program planning, public policy, structural racism, sustainability, and quality improvement.

Results: The findings from the three research are summarized as follows:

Research 1 discerned four distinct phases in MCH activities: advocacy, leadership, program planning, and policy development. Research 2 indicated that despite the widespread distribution of the MCH Handbook, achieving health equality remains elusive even with a 95% coverage rate. This disparity is attributed to a lack of recognition of the handbook's significance and improper use in the Lebanese context. Notably, improper utilization includes tearing off pages to fill out the vaccination record. Moreover, the study revealed that Lebanon predominantly engages in program planning, neglecting advocacy, leadership, or policy development. Research 3 extended the understanding of the four phases identified in Research 1—advocacy, leadership, program planning, and policy development—by categorizing them into three stages: developing, disseminating, and maintaining.

Conclusion: Merely disseminating the MCH Handbook is insufficient for achieving health equality. The Japanese experience highlights the significance of the three-stage approach encompassing development, dissemination, and maintenance—for the success of the MCH Handbook as an intervention. An internal key success factor observed in Japan was the central role of health motivation in the lives of the Japanese people. Sustaining the continuous recording of individuals' health motivations is crucial for ingraining the MCH Handbook as a

cultural practice and ensuring its long-term sustainability. In essence, addressing health inequality is achievable through fostering health motivation and maintaining the MCH Handbook.

Keywords: MCH Handbook, health equality, advocacy, leadership, program planning, policy development, developing stage, disseminating stage, and maintaining stage.