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**Mothers' experiences of having a preterm baby in the special care baby unit,  
Teaching Hospital, Anuradhapura**

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**Introduction:** Fifteen millions of babies are born too early every year. There is a great emotional impact on the family and economic impact on the country as the baby requires special care in a special baby care unit. Studying these mothers' experiences is paramount important to provide more effective care for both the baby and mother. Thus, the aim of this study was to study mothers' experiences on having a preterm baby at the special care baby unit, Teaching Hospital, Anuradhapura.

**Methodology:** This was a qualitative phenomenological descriptive study conducted at the Teaching Hospital Anuradhapura during January to March 2017. A sample of 10 mothers (19-33 years old) who were admitted to the Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) with preterm babies purposively recruited for the study. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka, Colombo and informed consent was obtained from each

voluntary participant prior to data collection. In-depth interviews approximately lasting from 30-45 minutes were conducted using semi-structured interviewer guide. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed to verbatim, and the transcriptions were reviewed to ensure accuracy. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis method.

**Results:** Three themes were merged using the data as "impression/feelings on having a preterm baby", "mothers' perspective on neonatal care", and "suffering from separation". Mothers became depressed when they saw the baby for the first time, as they never wished for such a type of birth. When seeing the baby with the instruments, they felt sad and more anxious. They did not have any idea how to raise such a baby. Further, their perspective on neonatal care by health caregivers was in a satisfactory level. They often sought the information about the progress of the baby and learned the caring of the baby from the health care providers. Furthermore, they

were suffering from separation from the baby. Sometimes, they thought to take the baby out. They needed to be with the baby more time and felt happy with changing nappies and especially, with breastfeeding.

**Discussion:** Mothers had depressed feelings about having a preterm baby with illness and seeing them with instruments as emphasized by the findings of Korja et al. (2009). However, they being satisfied and happy about neonatal health care and often get information about the baby's improvement. Iran mothers also stated that the nurses cared their babies well and informed them adequately (Malakouti et al., 2013). Mothers suffered from the separation of the baby and preferred to spend more time with the baby and be happier with caring and breastfeeding which were similar to the findings of Flacking et al. (2012).

**Conclusion:** Mothers were depressed and anxious about having a pre-term baby. They suffered from the separation of the baby and needed to care and spend more time with the baby. However, mothers were surprised and satisfied with the neonatal health care. Further studies

are required to explore the areas and improving the quality of life of both the babies and mothers.

**Keywords:** mothers' experiences, neonatal care, preterm baby, special care baby unit

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