

Over the years, Kenya has recorded poor maternal health indicators including among others a high maternal mortality rate and a declining trend in utilization of maternity services. It is estimated that the maternal mortality rate stands at 670 per 100,000 live-births making her one of the countries with highest maternal mortality rates (WHO, 1996). According to the annual report of the Ministry of Health (1998), Eastern Province had the third highest maternal mortality rate in the country. In spite of this, information regarding utilization of antenatal and maternity services in Mbeere, one of the 12 Districts in the Province remains scanty. A survey was therefore carried out with the aim of assessing utilization of these services in the District. This was a cross-sectional, descriptive study whose study population comprised of mothers bringing their children to the child welfare clinics in the four government rural health centres of the District. A total of 200 mothers were systematically sampled on random visiting days and personal interviews carried out using a structured questionnaire. In each of the health centres, additional qualitative data was obtained using Focus Group Discussions (FGD's) with a group of mothers. The results of the study showed that the proportion of mothers who utilized health facilities for antenatal, maternity and postnatal services was 97.5%, 52% and 25.3% respectively.

Utilization of health facilities for maternity services was significantly influenced by number of living children and distance to health facility in that, only 33% of those who had more than three living children utilized the services as compared to 58% of those with three children and below. Only 42% of those who lived 5km and beyond utilized the services as compared to 64% of those who lived less than 5km to a health facility. Among the reasons given by the mothers regarding dissatisfaction with the services offered in the health facilities included shortage of drugs and essential supplies, staff who were unfriendly and not committed to their work, inadequate quantity of food provided and lack of cleanliness in the health facilities. Health administrators and policy maker's can use the results of this study to enhance the provision of quality maternal health services. This in turn would motivate mothers to utilize the services hence increasing coverage.