

**Abstract 16:**

**Myths and misconceptions about immunization among parents of children under 5 years in the Nallur MOH area**

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**Background and objective:** Despite the well-established immunization programmes in Sri Lanka, parents still have false beliefs about vaccines. The objective of this study was to describe the myths and misconceptions about immunization among parents of children under 5 years in Nallur MOH area and the factors associated with myths and misconceptions.

**Methods:** A clinic-based descriptive cross-sectional study was carried out among parents of children under 5 years immunized at clinics in the Nallur MOH area. Data were collected from all five clinics in the Nallur MOH area. Proportionate sampling was used to determine the sample size to be recruited from each clinic and systematic random sampling was used to select participants from each clinic. An interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. Chi-square test/Fisher's exact test was performed to determine the association between myths/misconceptions and sociodemographic factors. A value <0.05 was considered significant.

**Results:** Of 382 participants, the majority were mothers 79.8% (n=305). Most identified as Tamil (99.2%) and Hindu (81.7%). Nuclear family (60.2%) was the most common family structure. Six myths and seven misconceptions were reported. Majority had belief in at least one myth (88%) or misconception (91%). The most prevalent myths were avoiding baths post-immunization (54.2%), followed by avoiding certain food items during the immunization period (36.6%). Common misconceptions were that a child will get 100% protection from the disease (58.4%), vaccines will increase the tendency for allergies (26.2%) and preterm babies may follow the normal immunization procedure (20.7%). Grandparents were the main source of beliefs (39.8%). Belief in myths was significantly associated with religion (p=0.047) and number of children (p=0.027). Misconceptions were significantly associated with age of the parent (p=0.037) and religion (p=0.029).

**Conclusions and recommendations:** The study found a high prevalence of myths and misconceptions about immunization among parents of young children in the Nallur MOH area. Poor understanding about vaccines may lead to incorrect practices in handling immunization-related events. Educating the parents about vaccines may reduce the false beliefs.

**Keywords:** Myths, Misconceptions, Parents, Young children, Jaffna