

Promoting safety and supporting culturally valued infant care: the Pēpi-pod Program

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Background: The risk of sudden unexpected death in infancy (SUDI) is three times higher for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies compared with non-Indigenous infants [1]. Co-sleeping is a common practice particularly for breastfeeding infants, and the cultural norm in many Indigenous communities. However infant deaths are associated with co-sleeping in hazardous circumstances.

The use of portable sleep spaces to reduce the risk of SUDI for families with identified risk factors has not been previously reported in Australia. Indigenous communities have identified this area as a priority for investigation [2].

Aim: This study aimed to determine the acceptability, feasibility and effectiveness of the Pēpi-pod Program, a portable infant sleep space embedded within safe sleep health promotion, within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Methods: A community participatory approach was used to report parent experiences (target n=300) of using the Pēpi-pod Program to support safe infant sleep. Families were selected through ten health services which provide maternity and child health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, in metropolitan, rural and remote areas of Queensland. Eligible participants were parent/s and/or carers of a baby (ideally <1 month of age) with the presence of one or more known SUDI risk factors [1].

The Pēpi-pod Program [3] comprises three interlinked components: 1) Safe Space: a polypropylene box transformed into an infant bed through addition of a fabric cover, mattress and bedding; 2) Safe Care: parent education and safety briefing; 3) Role of family: families share what they learn about safe infant sleeping. Parent questionnaires were administered face-to-face or by telephone within 2 weeks of receiving the Pēpi-pod; then monthly thereafter until pod use ceased by local health care provider.

Results: A total of 90 families meeting eligibility criteria were recruited by November 2014, with a minimum of 150 families anticipated by May 2014. The acceptability of the Pēpi-pod as a safe sleep space for babies was supported by parent responses that related to three key themes: safety, convenience and portability. Awareness of safe sleeping messages has been raised in families and through social networks. Pēpi-pod Program has been integrated into current service provision within several organisations.

Conclusion: The Pēpi-pod program was accepted and used appropriately by parents living in Queensland Indigenous communities. To further reduce SUDI, innovative strategies which allow for co-sleeping benefits, respect cultural norms and infant care practices, whilst enabling safe sleep environments are necessary.

References

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3. Cowan S, Bennett S, Clarke J & Pease A. (2013) An evaluation of portable sleeping spaces for babies following the Christchurch earthquake of February 2011. *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* 49(5): 364-8.