

A Qualitative Approach to Understand Iron Deficiency Anaemia in Pregnancy: A Case Study of the Kalutara District, Sri Lanka

Pitigala, Kalharie, De Silva, W. Indralal

Department of Demography, University of Colombo

Indralald37@gmail.com

Anaemia is a global public health problem that affects the social and economic development of a country. 30% of the world's population is anaemic and 50% of it is due to iron deficiency. Anaemia in pregnancy has become a fatal condition in Sri Lanka, leading to maternal as well as neonatal morbidities, mortality, still births, low birth weight babies, premature deliveries and postnatal depression. According to the WHO estimates, the prevalence of anaemia during pregnancy in Sri Lanka is 29.3%. The objective of this study was to provide an in-depth analysis of the factors that lead to persistence of iron deficiency anaemia in pregnancy (and to provide a strategic framework to overcome it). The study is largely qualitative and follows a mixed method approach. An in-depth analysis of thirty anaemic mothers from urban, rural and estate sectors of the Kalutara district; at the end of their first, second and third trimesters has been presented. According to the results, the highest percentage of the moderately anaemic pregnant mothers was seen in the rural sector (53.3%). Of those in the urban sector, the highest percentage showed mild anaemia (53.3%). It was evident that only 3.3% of the mothers from each sector suffered from severe anaemia. A total of 9 anaemic pregnant mothers (10%, n = 90) have had an immediate family member who suffered from anaemia. It was found that the prevalence of iron deficiency varies greatly according to host factors such as age, number of born children, education, environment, family size and wealth quintile. Dietary factors, obstetric factors, negligence and irregular use of the iron supplement were revealed as the main causes of iron deficiency anaemia in pregnancy. The other factors such as poverty, lack of education, morning sickness, superstitions, cultural influences, language barriers, family influences, ignorance and disinterest on contraceptives also have indirectly contributed towards anaemia.

Key words: *Iron Deficiency, Anaemia, Pregnancy, Sri Lanka.*