

AWARENESS, PREVALENCE AND DETERMINANTS OF PRECONCEPTION FOLIC ACID INTAKE IN ANTENATAL MOTHERS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN GALLE

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Introduction:

Preconception folic acid (FA) supplementation is a key to prevent neural tube defects among children. A better knowledge on importance of FA would increase its intake preconceptionally.

Objectives:

This study was carried out to assess the awareness, practices and determinants of preconception FA intake of the antenatal mothers in Galle.

Methods:

A cross-sectional study was carried out recruiting 350 antenatal mothers attending the field antenatal clinics conducted by the Bope-Poddala Medical Officer of Health, health unit area.

Data on preconception FA intake and the awareness on the importance of FA were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. Univariate and multivariate regression analysis were performed to detect the factors associated with FA intake and awareness. Significance level was considered as $p < 0.05$.

Results:

Mean (\pm SD) age of the mothers was 28.7 ± 5.2 years. The majority ($n=275$, 78.6%) of the mothers were educated above GCE ordinary level. Forty four percent ($n=154$) were primigravid

mothers. Preconception FA intake for more than one month was reported by 62.3% (n=218). Seventy-one percent primigravid mothers and 55% of multi-gravid mothers have taken preconception FA. Risk factors for poor FA intake were younger maternal age (OR=2.1, 95% CI=1.2-3.7), low educational level of the mother (OR=2.0, 95% CI=1.1-3.6) and multiparity (OR=2.4, 95% CI=1.4-3.9).

Awareness on the importance of preconception FA among the mothers who have taken preconception FA was 40.8%. Prevention of birth defects of nervous system and the development of the nervous system of the foetus were identified as the importance of preconception FA by only 11 (5.0%) and 78 (35.8%) mothers respectively. The majority 129 (59.2%) gave incorrect or nonspecific answers. None of the socio-demographic characteristics were associated with the awareness on the importance of FA.

Conclusions:

The awareness of the importance of preconception FA is low among the antenatal mothers in Galle. Preconception care services delivered before first pregnancy might have played a role in increasing intake of FA among the primigravid mothers. There is a necessity to increase the awareness on the importance of preconception FA among eligible females in the country starting from adolescence.