

# MATERNAL DIETARY BEHAVIOURS AMONG MOTHERS IN JAFFNA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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Mothers in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka are in the recovery phase of long-term ethnic conflict, which devastated their social life. Aim of this study was to assess the dietary behaviours of pregnant mothers in the Jaffna district during third trimester. 477 pregnant mothers were randomly selected and questioned by interviewer-administered questionnaire. Dietary behaviours, including consumption of vegetables, fruit, milk, fish, meat, potato, egg, soy meat and cabbage were assessed. Information regarding socio-economic background, maternal characteristics such as gestational age at delivery and anthropometric measurements (height and weight) from mothers were obtained by using standard methods. Among the 477 pregnant women, average age, weight, height and gestational age were 28.95 ( $\pm 5.46$ ) years, 63.02 ( $\pm 11.56$ ) kg, 154.39 ( $\pm 6.00$ ) cm and 39.33 ( $\pm 1.37$ ) weeks respectively. Mothers who had no formal education, grade 1-5, grades 6-11, grades 12-13 and degree & above were 0.2 (n=1), 9.6 (n=46), 58.9 (n=281), 23.9 (n=114) and 7.3% (n=35), respectively. Mean consumption of green leafy vegetables and fruits per day were 0.65 spoon (49g) (range 1-6 spoons) and 0.46 fruits (92g) (range 1-3 fruits) respectively. Twelve percent (n=57) and 13.6 % (n=65) of mothers reported that they avoid consumption of fruits and green leafy vegetables respectively throughout the gestation. Maternal dietary behaviours were associated with a variety of maternal socio-demographic characteristics, however no single parameter was associated with all the dietary behaviours. According to the food based dietary guidelines for Sri Lankan pregnant mothers, cow's milk and fish consumption were at satisfactory level among the pregnant women in this study sample.

**Keywords:** Anthropometry, Dietary Behaviors, Pregnant Mothers, Socio Demography, Third Trimester