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Socio-demographic Characteristics of Adolescent Pregnant Women in the Galle District: A Hospital-based Descriptive Cross-sectional Study

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Background: Adolescence is defined as the age between 10 to 19 years. Adolescent pregnancies are a global problem with unfavourable health, social and economic consequences and it has a higher maternal mortality and morbidity. Therefore, preventing adolescent pregnancy is very important. In Sri Lanka rate of adolescent pregnancy is 4.4% in both 2018 and 2019.

Objectives: To identify the socio-demographic characteristics of adolescent pregnant women in the Galle district.

Methods: A hospital based descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in antenatal clinics of four main hospitals in the Galle district: Teaching Hospital (Mahamodara) and Base Hospitals (Balapitiya, Udugama, Elpitiya). The study sample comprised of 252 adolescent pregnant women, and their socio-demographic data were collected by using an interviewer-administered questionnaire.

Results: The mean age of the study participants was 18.2 years and the majority were in the age group of 19-20 years (n=109, 43.2%). Most of the participants were married (n=199, 78.9%) and living in rural areas (n=184, 73%). The majority of participants studied up to O/L (56.7%, n=143) and 92.9% (n=234) of them were unemployed. Fathers in the majority (n=157, 68.8%) of the families were labourers whereas 119 (49.0%) mothers were unemployed. Majority of partners of the study participants were between 20-23 years (n=125, 49.6%) and studied up to O/L (n=147, 58.3%). The duration of relationship of majority of couples (n=141, 56%) was less than eight months. Age at first sex of the majority (n=166, 65.9%) of the participants was 16 to 18 years and 178 (69.5%) of pregnancies were unplanned and 134 (53.2%) were unwanted.

Conclusions: Low levels of education, being in a rural community and poverty were some of the factors which may contributed to adolescent pregnancies. Unplanned and unwanted pregnancies following a short duration of relationship with partners highlighted the importance of having proper education on sexual and reproductive health during early adolescent period.

Keywords: Adolescent pregnancy, Galle district, Socio-demographic characteristics