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## Prevalence, Severity and Management of Dietary Problems in Pregnancy among Pregnant Mothers Admitted to a Tertiary Care Obstetric Facility in Southern Sri Lanka

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**Background:** Maternal nutrition is an important determinant of fetal growth and development. Therefore, it is essential to ensure an adequate and balanced diet during pregnancy. Many pregnant mothers experience dietary problems in pregnancy due to physiological changes and/or dietary behaviors that are generally neglected in routine healthcare provision.

**Objectives:** To assess the prevalence of dietary problems in pregnancy, their severity and management among pregnant mothers admitted to Teaching Hospital, Mahamodara, Sri Lanka

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was conducted among a consecutive sample of 384 mothers who delivered their babies at the four maternity wards of Teaching Hospital, Mahamodara during November 2019. An interviewer administered questionnaire was administered which was developed based on expert opinion and published literature. Severity of dietary problems was assessed based on the effect it had on the daily life of the mother. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.

**Results:** Of the participants, 88.3% were Sinhalese, 0.8% was Tamils and 10.9% were Muslims. Their mean ( $\pm$ SD) age of the mothers was 28.8 ( $\pm$ 5.7) years. Approximately, 96.4% had experienced at least one dietary problem during the pregnancy and the highest prevalence of dietary problems was observed in the first trimester (86.5%). The commonest dietary problem experienced was food aversions (71.6%), followed by morning sickness (67.7%), food cravings (54.7%) and heart burn (46.9%). 38.8% mothers experienced constipation. According to clinical records, 40.9% had Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA) and 12.2% had Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM). The least common dietary problems were pica (7.6%) and food borne illnesses (0.3%). A considerable proportion of mothers with food aversion (56.9%), morning sickness (52.1%), heart burn (38.1%) and constipation (10.7%) had their daily life affected by these conditions. The majority had not used any treatment to manage the dietary problems except those with IDA and GDM; nearly 96% with IDA used western medicine and most of mothers (61.7%) with GDM used dietary modifications. Few mothers required hospital admission for food aversion (4.7%), morning sickness (7.3%) and heart burn (1.7%).

**Conclusions:** Majority of the mothers experienced dietary problems during pregnancy; the commonest being food aversion. Although food aversion, morning sickness, heart burn and constipation had affected their daily life, most did not seek any treatment.

**Keywords:** Dietary problems, Management, Pregnancy, Sri Lanka