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Effect of COVID-19 outbreak on maternal and child health services: the experience of pregnant mothers in Anuradhapura District

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Background: Evidence suggests that during the COVID-19 pandemic, health services have been partially or completely disrupted in many countries. In Sri Lanka, national guidelines have been developed during the initial stages of the country epidemic, to provide essential maternal and child health (MCH) services.

Objective: To describe the effect of COVID-19 outbreak on maternal and child health services in Anuradhapura district.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted among 712 pregnant women, who have been enrolled in an on-going large cohort in Anuradhapura district before 12 weeks of gestation between July to September 2019, namely Rajarata Pregnancy Cohort (RaPCo). The pregnant women were from ten MOH areas in Anuradhapura district. Data was collected through telephone interviews by five trained pre-intern medical officers using a pre-tested interviewer guide.

Results: Of the 712 pregnant women, 359 (50.4%) were contactable and responded. Mean age of the sample of women who responded was 28.4 years (SD=5.3). Forty-seven mothers (13.2%) complained that their scheduled clinic visits were affected due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Only six mothers (1.7%) had reported that their previously decided place of delivery was changed due to the prevailing COVID-19 situation. Except, for one mother, all others (n=358, 99.7%) had not changed their pre-determined mode of delivery. Only three mothers (0.8%) claimed that they did not receive anticipated family support due to various COVID-19 related restrictions. All mothers were satisfied with the services provided by Public Health Midwife (PHM). None of the mothers complained that the expected service provision from the PHM was affected during the outbreak.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Despite the restrictions imposed with the COVID-19 outbreak and its control procedures, MCH care services at the field level were satisfactorily delivered. Grass root level health service delivery system has been a major strength during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain highest quality MCH care, which should be protected, strengthened and expanded to other primary care services.

Key words: COVID-19, maternal and child health services, Anuradhapura

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Clinical and epidemiological characteristics of the COVID-19 patients in the initial case series: Is Sri Lanka an outlier?

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Background: The epidemiology of COVID-19 varies between countries due to many reasons; thus, population-specific knowledge on the exposure, clinical course and outcomes is pivotal for advocating an evidence-based health sector response.

Objective: To describe the presentation of COVID-19 patients to hospital, their clinical course, outcome categories and factors associated with disease fatality in Sri Lanka

Methods: A retrospective study was conducted using secondary data extracted from bed head tickets and investigation reports from the first 100 COVID-19 confirmed patients who had been discharged or dead following their hospital stay in three designated COVID-19 treating hospitals in Sri Lanka. Clinical outcomes were categorized as mild, severe and critical as per the international classification. Frequency distributions with Kruskal-Wallis H test and Fisher's exact test were used to compare differences between variables.

Results: There were 94 discharges and six deaths. Mean age (SD) was 40.7 (17.7) years. Majority was males (65.0%). A recent history of returning from abroad was reported by 51.0%, while 24.0% of the patients had been close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 patients. Forty-three patients (43.0%) had at least one co-morbidity. Fever was the commonest symptom (66.0%) followed by dry cough (48.0%) and sore throat (29.0%). On average, patients presented early to hospital with a median duration of pre-hospital clinical course of 3.0 days (IQR=1.0-5.0). However, the median duration of hospital stay and total clinical course were 18.0 (IQR=14.0-20.0) and 19.0 (IQR=17.0-23.0) days. With regard to severity, 'mild' disease was predominant (92.0%), while 'severe' and 'critical' disease were present in only 2.0% and 6.0% respectively. Poorer outcome ('severe' or 'critical') was significantly associated with age >60 years ($p=0.034$) and having >2 co-morbidities ($p=0.012$), but not with delayed presentation ($p=0.073$). Only five patients required ventilation and all five did not survive the illness.

Conclusions & Recommendations: In contrast to countries at increased risk of COVID-19, the younger age and milder disease portrayed in local patients may reflect the early public health response to the pandemic in Sri Lanka. However, the factors determining disease fatality remain the same as in other countries.

Key words: COVID-19, Sri Lanka, patient outcomes, associations

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Effect of COVID-19 outbreak on household economic status of pregnant mothers in Anuradhapura district

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Background: The COVID-19 pandemic is having a devastating effect on all social and economic sectors across the globe. In Sri Lanka, national COVID-19 control measures have affected household economy of most of the families due to barriers to continue their routine income generating activities.

Objective: To describe how the COVID-19 outbreak has affected the household economic status of pregnant women in Anuradhapura district

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted among a sub-sample of pregnant women, who have been enrolled in an on-going large cohort in Anuradhapura, namely, Rajarata Pregnancy Cohort (RaPCo). Data was collected through telephone interviews by trained pre-intern medical officers using a pre-tested interviewer guide consisting of questions on household economical status during the COVID-19 outbreak. Altogether, 712 pregnant women from ten MOH areas in Anuradhapura district were contacted initially. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25.0. Chi-squared test was used to assess the statistical significance.