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ANAEMIA AND RISK FACTORS IN LACTATING MOTHERS: A CONCERN IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Anaemia is the most common nutritional deficiency indicator and health status in the world affecting about one third of the global population. Taking iron supplement during pregnancy is associated with reduction in anaemia among lactating mothers. The risk of anaemia in lactating mothers reduces with intake of iron supplement during pregnancy. Based on the study findings the researcher recommends the following. All lactating mothers should be encouraged by health team, starting with Village Health Team (VHTs) up to the facility level for regular haemoglobin checkup. Massive nutritional education should always be carried out on every antenatal and postnatal visit.

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Introduction:-

Lactating mothers are vulnerable to anemia (Ibekwe et al., 2022; Edward et al., 2021). During the period of lactation, mothers are susceptible to anaemia because of maternal iron depletion and blood loss during childbirth (Whitney et al., 2008). Studies have shown that, although breast milk is not a good source of iron, the concentration of iron in breast milk is independent of maternal iron status. Postpartum anaemia is highest in mothers who are anaemic during pregnancy (Serunjoji et al., 2003).

The prevalence of anaemia in lactating mothers

A study conducted in India among lactating mothers found out that the prevalence of anaemia was 66.0% (Singh et al., 2009). Another study done in Myanmar reported an anaemia prevalence rate of 60.3% in lactating mothers, with 20.3% of lactating mothers having severe anaemia (Zhao et al., 2014)

A study in Kenya concluded that lactating mothers whose haemoglobin levels were less than 12g/dL had prevalence of 43.8% (Etyyanga et al., 2013).

A cross-sectional study conducted from two rounds of the 2005 and 2011 in Ethiopia in Demographic and Health Survey (EDHS) found out that the prevalence of anaemia in lactating mothers was 22.1% (Lakew et al., 2015). The lower prevalence of anaemia in this study among lactating mothers may be due to the cultural norms of providing nutritional care to lactating mothers during the postpartum period. Lactating mothers are encouraged to rest for 3–6 months and to eat a variety of foods (Lakew et al., 2015).

Risk factors of anaemia in lactating mothers

Demographic factors

A study conducted in Ethiopia revealed that lactating mothers with husbands who had attended primary education were 21% less likely to have anaemia than those who had husbands with no education (adjusted OR (AOR) 0.79; 95% CI 0.68 to 0.91) (Lakew et al., 2015).

In the same study by Lakew et al. (2015), it concluded that the odds of working lactating mothers being anemic was 29% less than their counterparts (AOR 0.71; 95% CI 0.63 to 0.80). This may be because working mothers were earning money as compared with non-working mothers and the extra income enabled them to access and purchase more food items, including animal sources (meat, poultry, fish), and increase dietary diversity. Studies have shown that income growth improves diet diversity, which in turn improves intake of micronutrients, including iron (Doan et al., 2014).

According to a bivariate analysis, age and marital status were not statistically significant in the data from both individual surveys and pooled data conducted in Ethiopia in the period 2005–2011 (Lakew et al. 2015).

Obstetric factors

A study in Bahir Dar- Ethiopia (Feleke et al., 2018) showed that iron supplementation during pregnancy is negatively associated with having anaemia both for pregnant and lactating women. The possible explanation could be that, iron is the most important nutrient which is used for the formation of red blood cells and when it was taken during pregnancy it can have a probability of preventing anaemia during the lactation period as well.

A study by carried out in Ethiopia also revealed that lactating mothers who were taking modern contraceptives had a lower risk of having anaemia (Lakew et al., 2015).

Conclusion:-

The risk of anaemia in lactating mothers reduces with intake of iron supplement during pregnancy. Based on the study findings the researcher recommends the following. All lactating mothers should be encouraged by health team, starting with Village Health Team (VHTs) up to the facility level for regular haemoglobin checkup. Massive nutritional education should always be carried out on every antenatal and postnatal visits

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