

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Geophagy, Anaemia, and Perceived Health Impacts among Pregnant Women: Findings from a Comparative Cross-Sectional Study in Kenya

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Abstract

Objective: Geophagy practice is widespread despite the high prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women. Our study investigated the relationship between geophagy practices and anaemia among pregnant women. **Design:** A comparative cross-sectional study was conducted among 124 pregnant women from June to July 2024. A mixed-method approach was adopted. Questionnaires were used to collect data on socio-cultural and geophagy practices, while three focus group discussions were held to assess women's perceptions on geophagy practice and its health impacts. Quantitative data was entered into SPSS (version 27) and descriptive statistics, *Chi-square* test of association and logistic regression were conducted. We analysed qualitative data using thematic analysis. **Setting:** the study was conducted in Msambweni County Referral Hospital in Kenya. **Participants:** pregnant women attending antenatal clinic. **Results:** Majority of the study respondents were Muslims (85.2%), married (84.4%), earned Ksh. 20,000 – 30,000 per month (78.7%), from Digo ethnic group (75.4%), multiparous (70.5%), formally employed (63.9%), and had attained primary education level (52.5%). Majority of the respondents in the geophagous women bought the soft stones (62%) and were anaemic (64.8%). The geophagous women were three times (AOR = 3.378, $p = 0.002$) more likely to be anaemic as compared to the non-geophagous women. From the qualitative analysis, the respondents perceived cravings as the primary reason for practicing geophagy. Geophagy was perceived to lead to helminth infestation and anaemia among pregnant women. **Conclusion:** Geophagy practice was associated with anaemia among the respondents. Therefore, discouraging geophagy practices is necessary to mitigate the prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women.

Keywords: pregnant women, anaemia, geophagy practices, haemoglobin level