

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Addressing Iron Deficiency Anemia in Maternal Health: The Effectiveness of Psychosocial Support Groups in Samburu Subcounty, Kwale County

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Abstract

Introduction: Anemia in pregnancy is a well-known risk factor for adverse outcomes such as maternal death, still births, low birth weights and infant prematurity. Reducing the burden of anemia is a critical health priority that could improve maternal outcomes amongst pregnant women and their neonates. Iron Deficiency Anemia (IDA) affects 41.6% pregnant women nationally. Although there is limited data on IDA in Kwale county, Hemoglobin (Hb) levels are affected by factors such as diet, blood loss, medical conditions, lifestyle, gender, environmental and physiological factors. Kwale county has faced numerous challenges in achieving optimal nutrition indicators including IDA. **Methodology:** Mapping of Pregnant mothers with low HB of below 11.0g/dl during their first ANC visit was conducted in 2 facilities (Taru dispensary and Samburu subcounty hospital [SSCH]). Then, 2 psychosocial support groups (intervention groups) were formed in SSCH consisting of 20 pregnant mothers per group. The control group (pregnant mothers in Taru dispensary) were only supported with health education and IFAS. The mothers were followed up till they delivered their babies (first 3 weeks postpartum). **Results:** After one year, there was a noticeable improvement in HB levels of 320 (78.4%) mothers from 0.1g/dl to 7.5g/dl in SSCH. However, 27 mothers (6.6%) reduced between 0.1 to 1.5g/dl while 61 (15.0%) maintained. The average HB gain after one year was 3.1g/dl with 290 mothers having attained normal HB status upon discharge. In Taru, 207 (64.5%) mothers improved from 0.1g/dl to 4.5g/dl, 28 (8.7%) reduced while 86 (26.8%) maintained. The average HB gain for Taru dispensary was 2.1g/dl. The group approach enabled peer-to-peer learning, uptake and adherence of IFAS, enhanced social support and emotional well-being. The establishment of home gardens enabled mothers to learn and acquire skills that they replicated at the household level. **Conclusions:** Scale up this approach in similar settings or health programs to improve maternal and infant health outcomes.

Key words: Iron Deficiency Anemia, Psychosocial support group, Maternal health, Antenatal care, Hemoglobin levels