

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

[ID-O#056] Patterns of physical well-being and developmental characteristics of children of drug-addicted mothers in Sri Lanka and challenges in giving health care to such children

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Background: In Sri Lanka, no data are currently available regarding substance use during pregnancy and breast feeding, the adverse effects on the neonate and young children and the burden of mothers who continue to use substances during early years of their children. This study aimed to assess the patterns of physical well-being and developmental characteristics of children of drug-addicted women in Sri Lanka.

Methods: A 2-year prospective case-control study was conducted recruiting mothers who are either pregnant or having a child under 5 years and presented following illicit substance abuse. The study locations were National center for treatment and rehabilitation and National Prison in Colombo. The controls were healthy and matched for age and gender. Data were collected regarding physical and psychological well-being of children. Development and behavioural characteristics were assessed using a structured check list. In addition, focused group discussions were conducted to understand the potential reasons for substance abuse and challenges in giving health care to children.

Results: Seventy mothers were interviewed over two-year duration (age range: 21-43 years). Certain occupation groups were more prominently seen in fathers (40% three-wheel drivers) and mothers (working in spas and night clubs, drug selling and trafficking). 41 (77.4%) spouses were also abusing substances and 20.8% imprisoned). Sympathomimetics were the most commonly implicated substance (34, 64.1%). 14 (26.4%) used substances during pregnancy. Substance use during pregnancy was associated with low birth weight ($p=0.001$) and poor antenatal follow up ($p=0.001$). Children were affected with acute malnutrition ($p=0.0024$), delayed vaccination ($p=0.0014$), and delayed worm treatment ($p=0.0018$). Four children were at risk of abuse (7.5%). Delay in development was noted in 11.3% – 17% in different domains.

Conclusion: Children of mothers abusing illicit substances are more vulnerable for malnutrition, delayed vaccination and development. Low birth weight is associated with substance abuse during pregnancy.