

Lessons from a virtual counselling intervention to prevent anaemia in pregnancy in rural plains Nepal

Sanju Bhattarai¹, Bibhu Thapaliya¹, Samata Kumari Yadav¹, Abriti Arjyal¹, Santosh Giri¹, Sara Hillman², Helen Harris-Fry³, Naomi Saville², Sushil Baral¹, Joanna Morrison²

OBJECTIVE/ RATIONALE

- Anaemia causes 115,000 maternal deaths globally.¹
- In Nepal, 46% of pregnant women have anaemia, and it is more common in the plains.²
- Family engagement and counselling of pregnant women can increase compliance to iron folic acid tablets
- We conducted a randomised controlled trial of virtual antenatal counselling (VAC) with pregnant women at 12 and 28 weeks of pregnancy to 36 weeks.³
- We present process evaluation findings and their implications.

METHODS

- 20 SSIs with pregnant women who had received intervention
- 8 SSI husbands
- 7 SSI mother in law
- 2 SSI health volunteers, 12 SSI health workers
- 39 structured observations of counselling
- 4 FGDs with intervention implementers

Verbal and written informed consent to participate was taken. Three transcripts were inductively coded before discussing and finalizing the codebook. The coded data from the FGDs, SSI and the observations were entered in Excel matrix .

KEY RESULTS

- All respondents liked the dialogical approach to counselling. The story and facilitative communication skills were appreciated.
- Gender barriers affected effectiveness of the counselling. Women had low confidence in using mobile devices and household members restricted their access to the counselling. It was difficult for pregnant women to schedule a time for the call, as there were often competing demands on them.
“Pregnant women had shown interest and I had already given her the mobile device; at that point her husband arrived and said his wife won’t participate in Virtual counselling intervention as she didn’t need it” FGD_ field staff
- It was difficult to engage family members because they were often outside the home; the small screen made it difficult to interact, and some pregnant women preferred not to engage their family members.
“It took me 2-4 days to learn to use the mobile device. Didi (field staff) came over to my house 4 times ... I did not know how to open Zoom link either. My husband and Didi helped me to open it” SSI_pregnant women
- Pregnant women were generally not familiar with using ‘smart’ mobile devices and virtual platforms which restricted the utility of the counselling
- The need to frequently visit households to troubleshoot negated the virtual nature of the intervention.
- Electricity supply and network problems.



Nutrition Counsellors Providing VAC

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

It is important to understand the readiness of communities for a VAC before implementing this type of intervention. VAC may not be an effective means to engage families in addressing anaemia in pregnancy, but health workers, families and pregnant women were positive about the style of the counselling. Future interventions could use the dialogical approach in counselling to prevent anaemia in pregnancy

AFFILIATION

1. HERD International, Kathmandu, Nepal
2. UCL Institute of Global Health & UCL Institute of Women’s Health, London, UK
3. London School of Hygiene and Tropical medicine, London, UK

Keywords

Virtual intervention, nutrition, antenatal, Nepal, anaemia, iron folic acid,

References

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