

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study were to make a preliminary investigation to determine the prevalence of abortions and still births among nursing officers who are employed in the Teaching Hospitals of Colombo and to study associations, if any between the different types and patterns of exposure and adverse outcomes of pregnancy among this group.

The effects of the known risk factors and the influence of work exposure on complications of pregnancy, preterm deliveries and low birth weight was assessed by using a comparative approach where these indices in a sample of nursing officers was studied in relation to similar information obtained from a comparable group of working women ie. clerical and related workers. Since data collection depend on questionnaires, an assessment of the validity of the information thus obtained was carried out, by reference to hospital based medical records.

A prevalence of 12% foetal deaths (9.5% abortions and 1.5% still births) was observed among nursing officers. However, among them certain places and types of work seemed to be associated with a higher prevalence rate of foetal wastage as shown by 18% for those working in operating theatres, 21.9% in special care units and

18.1% for those doing field work, in comparison with 6% among those working in outpatient departments.

There were no significant differences seen in the occurrence of complications of pregnancy, preterm deliveries and low birth weight among the nursing officers and the control group which included clerical and related workers. The effect of work exposure as a nursing officer seemed to have a protective influence on the occurrence of 'low birth weight' thus mitigating the effect of other factors such as advanced maternal age, short stature and previous history of low birth weight.

Questionnaire appeared to be a useful, cheap and valuable method able to elicit valid information in the study of foetal wastage and low birth weight.

The findings indicate, further studies at national level with a view to identifying intervention programmes.