

SUMMARY

Late childbearing shows an increasing trend at present. Thus the problems associated with and reasons for late childbearing was addressed in this study. Two hundred and fifty mothers who delivered their first child at or above the age of 35 years were studied in comparison with 250 who delivered their first child at the age of 20 - 29 years in the DMH and the CSHW hospitals. Data were collected by interviewing the mothers after delivery and from the medical records.

Women with higher education , better employment, and higher income were more likely to have delayed childbearing. The study revealed more Sinhalese women having late childbearing compared to other ethnic groups.

Late age at marriage was the most important determinant of delayed childbearing. The most frequent reasons for the late age at marriage was the difficulty in finding a partner, problems related to horoscope and woman's tertiary education in that order of frequency. In addition to being late at marriage, subfertility and abortions have made some of the women even older at the first child birth. Contraception has not played a big role in delayed birth of the first child.

The present study confirmed the findings of many other studies showing first pregnancy at or above the age of 35 years having more antenatal complications, more instrumental

and operational deliveries, more low birth weight babies and larger number of newborns needing special neonatal care compared to the first pregnancies in younger mothers.

Findings of the present study highlights the areas where interventional programs could be directed such as education of adolescent girls regarding safe motherhood, motivation of women in seeking early medical advice for non conception which would help to reduce high risk 'too late' pregnancies to some extent.

