# ABSTRACT

"Low birth weight is the single most important factor determining the survival chances of the child. The infant mortality is 20 times greater for all low birth weight babies than for other babies and the survival rates are also low. Many of them become the victims of protein energy malnutrition and infection" "The cause of Low Birth Weight (LBW) is multi factorial". Low Birth Weight prevalence (17.1% in 2002) is still an important challenge of the health sector and the country[1].

A hospital based descriptive cross sectional study was conducted to determine the prevalence of low birth weight among babies born at GH Ampara and to study the association between low birth weight and selected factors of antenatal care, maternal, foetal factors and social factors. This study was conducted during November to December 2005 with a sample size of 251. An interviewer administered questionnaire was used to collect the data from mothers.

The study results revealed a mean birth weight of 2850.4g (SD 475.4) and a low birth weight prevalence of 16.7%. Two thirds (69.1%) of low birth weights were due to intrauterine growth retardation (IUGR) and the rest (30.9%) were due to prematurity. The mean total weight gain during pregnancy was 8.9kg. 76.3 % of mothers had gained weight less than 12kg and 31.8% of mothers were underweight (low BMI).

The only factor that showed statistically significant association with both LBW and mean birth weight was the mothers having monthly family income less than Rs. 6000. Statistically significant higher mean birth weight was found with mothers who had monthly income of more than 6000 rupees, who had weight gain during pregnancy 9kg. or more, increasing maternal age and increase in parity.

The factors like mother's level of education, pregnancy interval, Specialist care during the anatenatal period, immunization against Rubella, POA at first ante natal clinic, BMI level did not show differences in LBW prevalence. Prematurity did not show statistically significant association with any factor studied, as the number was small.

In conclusion this study shows a high low birth weight prevalence which is comparable to the National level. It is recommended to advise mothers to achieve adequate weight gain during pregnancy, avoid passive smoking inside the house and to maintain the proper ventilation facilities at cooking places. The low income group and primi mothers should be included for special attention and recommended to study further to identify the causal factors at local and national level to plan appropriate preventive programme in Ampara district and national level.