

## **ABSTRACT**

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Sri Lankan maternal health programme achieved the desired targets of maternal mortality reduction. However, the morbidity reduction and quality improvement need exploration of new areas of interventions. Fear of Childbirth (FOC) or tokophobia is a common problem affecting women's health and wellbeing, and a common reason for requesting caesarean section worldwide. As a country in transition in maternal healthcare, identification of FOC will be helpful in expanding the maternal health services and quality improvement. The objectives of the present study were to; determine the prevalence of severe fear of childbirth and to describe the association between the selected socio-demographic factors and preferred method of delivery in relation to FOC among pregnant women presented to specialized antenatal clinics in Badulla district.

For those purposes, a specialized clinic based cross-sectional descriptive study was carried out. This was done in 4 specialized clinics of the Badulla district those which cater the pregnant women in all 16 MOH areas in the district. Sampling was done according to proportionate to clinic attendance in specialized clinic method since the sampling frame is not available for the above population. The total number of women studied was 692. Pre-tested interviewer-administered structured questionnaire made by the primary investigator; include socio-demographic, pregnancy related data and factors related to FOC and two validated self-administered questionnaires (WDEQ-A and EPDS) were used to collect data.

In total, 692 were interviewed; 31(5%) were excluded and completed 661(95%) sample assessed for analysis. (response rate 95%)

Even though in the literature various definitions and measurements of FOC were used, in this study; the most frequently-used scale-W-DEQ with cut-off points  $\geq 85$  was used, describing severe /intense fear status. Out of these 661 attendants, 13.2 % (C.I.10.3-15.6) of pregnant women followed up in specialized antenatal clinics in Badulla district are having severe fear of childbirth for the current pregnancy.

Data was entered to Epi-info database and statistical analysis was performed using IBM SPSS package version 23. Chi-square method was used for data analysis. Overall pooled prevalence was detected as 13.2% (CI 10.3%-15.6%) Subgroup analysis according to the parity showed that tokophobia was more prevalent in nulliparous women (17.7%) than multi (10.6%). Elements associated with family, partner, as well as factors related to social capital and related micro-environmental factors showed highly significant statistical associations with FOC( $p < 0.001$  in all cases), while having a significant medical history( $p = 0.001$ ) or surgical conditions( $p = 0.000$ ) and antenatal complications( $p = 0.000$ ), significant postnatal complication( $p = 0.000$ ) in previous pregnancies among multiparous women also showed highly significant statistical associations. Findings concerning antenatal depression also showed significant association with FOC( $p = 0.000$ ). Private sector follows up preference was higher among women who had FOC but statistically insignificant. ( $p = 0.149$ ) Most clinically and statistically significant ( $p = 0.000$ ) finding during our study was, among the women who had fear of childbirth 23.3% ( $n = 30$ ) preferred on caesarean delivery.

High rates of FOC/tokophobia among this study group clearly indicates the need of improvement in maternal mental health services and quality improvement, monitoring and follow up plans for women with deranged mental wellbeing. This service should be also offered by the private sector and the care given should be focused beyond the “medical”

care. Social and family factors are highly related to FOC and the current social risk identification by PHM and healthcare workers should be strengthened. Follow up studies are needed to see whether FOC is associated with high LSCS and adverse pregnancy outcome.

Keywords: Fear of childbirth, tokophobia, Prevalence, WDEQ-A