

Research

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Disparities in health and nutrition between semi-urban and rural mothers and birth outcomes of their newborns in Bukavu, DR Congo: a baseline assessment

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Abstract

Aim: This research aimed to evaluate health and nutritional practices of mothers during pregnancy and birth outcomes of their newborns in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), comparing semi-urban and rural areas. **Background:** Health and nutrition during pregnancy are crucial for adequate development of the fetus. Health care plays an important role but is often poor in rural areas of developing countries. **Methods:** A baseline survey of a nutritional follow-up study was conducted in two semi-urban and one rural hospital in the vicinity of Bukavu, DRC. In total, 471 mother-child pairs were recruited after delivery. Data collection included socio-demographic parameters, nutrition and health measures during pregnancy, and anthropometric parameters. Semi-urban and rural study locations were compared and predictors of birth weight evaluated. **Findings:** Semi-urban and rural mothers differed significantly in nutrition and health practices during pregnancy, as well as birth outcomes. In the rural area, there was a higher rate of newborns with low birth weight (10.7%) and lower rates of antimalarial medication (80.8%), deworming (24.6%), consumption of nutritional supplements (81.5%), and being informed about nutrition by medical staff (32.8%) during pregnancy as well as practicing family planning (3.1%) than in the semi-urban areas (2.7%, 88.6%, 88.3%; 89.3%, 46.5%, and 17.1%, respectively). Birth weight was positively predicted by increasing maternal MUAC, age, and gestational age and negatively by rural location, being primipara, being a farmer, and female newborn sex. **Conclusion:** The findings highlight the importance of strengthening antenatal care activities especially in rural areas in order to ameliorate both maternal and infantile health and ensure appropriate development.