

## Original Research Article

# Factors Influencing The Attitude and Practice Towards Anaemia Management Among Pregnant Women Attending Primary Healthcare Clinics in the Kuala Langat District (FAP-PW): A Cross-Sectional Study.

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Clinical observation has shown suboptimal knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) among pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinics in the Kuala Langat district. This study aims to determine the KAP of anaemia management among pregnant women and its associated factors.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional study was carried out among 395 pregnant women from May to August 2023. We included pregnant women aged 18 years and above at 34 to 38 weeks of gestation and excluded those who were illiterate in the Bahasa Melayu language or had poor cognition. The KAP was assessed using a 49-item validated questionnaire: 19 questions (knowledge), 17 questions (attitude) and 13 questions (practice) related to anaemia during pregnancy, its common cause, signs, symptoms, treatment and prevention.

**Results:** The majority (83.1%) attained good knowledge scores. 92.8% had poor attitude scores and 31.0% had poor practice scores. Using multivariate logistic regression analysis, two factors: (1) complications during pregnancy (OR=0.26, 95% CI 0.07, 0.97,  $p<0.046$ ), (2) late bookers (OR=1.30, 95% CI 1.04, 1.62,  $p<0.022$ ) were significantly associated with the poor attitude. Three factors: (1) spacing (OR=1.97, 95% CI 1.20, 3.25,  $p<0.008$ ), (2) pre-pregnancy iron supplements (OR=0.62, 95% CI 0.39, 1.00,  $p<0.049$ ) (3) good knowledge (OR=0.21, 95% CI 0.06, 0.74,  $p<0.015$ ) were significantly associated with the poor practice.

**Conclusion:** This study indicated poor attitudes among pregnant women. Primary care providers play a pivotal role in counselling and strengthening health literacy among pregnant women.

*Keywords: attitude, practice, anaemia, pregnancy, primary care*

### INTRODUCTION

Anemia in pregnancy is defined as a hemoglobin (Hb) level of  $< 11.0$  g/dl while its severity is classified as severe (Hb $<7$  g/dl), moderate (Hb 7.0-9.9 g/dl), to mild anemia (Hb 10.0-10.9 g/dl).<sup>(1,2)</sup> The problem of anemia affects half a billion women of reproductive age globally and remains a critical challenge mainly in Low and Middle-Income Countries such as Malaysia.<sup>(3)</sup>

In Malaysia, anaemia in pregnancy remains a challenging health problem with its prevalence of 30% among reproductive age and 19.3 to 57.4% in pregnant women.(2,4) It was also shown that 80-90% of the pregnant women in Malaysia have low iron stores while 38-42% develop anemia as pregnancy advances due to IDA.(2,5)

Currently, the Ministry of Health Malaysia has integrated strategies under maternal and child healthcare programs whereby the management of IDA in pregnancy is standardized according to the Malaysian Perinatal Care Manual and iron supplementation is readily made available to all pregnant women in primary care health clinics.(6) Nevertheless, despite efforts to mitigate the problem of anemia in the district, clinical audits have shown suboptimal health literacy and treatment compliance among pregnant women. To date, there is also a scarcity of existing local studies pertaining to the root cause of IDA in pregnancy and indeed an exigency to implement strategies to alleviate this problem.(4)

Moving on, the risk factors of anemia in pregnancy in Malaysia were found to be higher in the rural compared to urban and associated with the following antenatal characteristics; late antenatal booking, extremes of reproductive age, non-compliance to iron supplements, being in second or third trimester while the sociodemographic characteristics were; Indian ethnicity, low maternal educational level, low family income, and unemployment.(4) In addition, IDA in pregnancy leads to major adverse effects in both maternal and fetal outcomes if not adequately managed such as postpartum hemorrhage leading to twice the risk of maternal death and heart failure.(4,7) Whereas in the fetal outcome, it could lead to neonatal IDA, risk of adult hypertension, low birth weight, prematurity, and adverse effects on cognitive function and behaviour.(4,7)

Clinical observation has shown suboptimal KAP among pregnant women attending government primary healthcare clinics in the Kuala Langat district. Looking into the Kuala Langat district health department Selangor data, the prevalence of pregnant women at 36 weeks of gestation with Hb level of <11.0g/dl remains high (>5%) over the consecutive years. Presently, there are no studies done in the district to determine the cause of the high

prevalence of anaemia among pregnant women at 36 weeks of gestation. Hence this study aimed to determine KAP levels regarding anaemia among pregnant women in the district and to identify its association with the socio-demographic and antenatal characteristics. With this, early identification of the root cause of anaemia among pregnant women in the district could facilitate early intervention and preventive measures in the local community.

## **METHODS**

A cross-sectional study was conducted from May to August 2023 in ten government primary healthcare clinics providing antenatal services in Kuala Langat Selangor. All pregnant women aged 18 years and above at 34 to 38 weeks of gestation were invited to participate in the study. Those who were illiterate in the Bahasa Melayu language or had poor cognition were excluded. The sampling method was conducted by systematic random sampling. The study sample size was determined with single and two-sample proportion formulas.(8) The sample size calculated was 395 pregnant women with a 20% drop-out rate.

The self-administered questionnaire was made available in the Bahasa Melayu language as the majority (80%) of the pregnant women in the district are of Malay ethnicity. Anonymous of the participants of the study was carried out to ensure confidentiality and mitigate response bias. This could encourage participants to answer the questionnaire honestly reflecting their attitudes and practices. There were five sections in the questionnaire whereby the first section examined the socio-demographic characteristics (age, ethnicity, education level, occupation, income, marital status). The second section examined the antenatal characteristics (BMI, booking gestation, booking and current haemoglobin level, parity, spacing, the presence of haematological disease, complication during pregnancy, miscarriage, pre-pregnancy iron supplement intake, diet). The third section examined the knowledge, attitude and practices (KAP) using a locally validated questionnaire.(7)

This validated questionnaire on KAP of anaemia management consisted of a total of 49 items: 19 (knowledge), 17 (attitude) and 13 (practice) related to anaemia, its common cause, signs

and symptoms, treatment and prevention.(7) Frequency analysis was calculated for each question for the KAP domains using percentages of correct versus incorrect answers in the knowledge domain (true/false), positively versus negatively answered questions in the attitude (agree/disagree) and practice domains (yes/no).(7) In the knowledge domain, a score of 1 was given for the correct answer and 0 if incorrect, while in the attitude domain, good responses were scored as 1 and poor responses were scored as 0.(7) Positive answers were scored as 1 and negative answers were scored as 0 for the practice domain.(7) The overall KAP domains were assessed using sum score outcome, which was classified into two categories: good and poor. A score of below 70% was rated as poor while 70% and above was rated as a good level. The items in the knowledge and attitude domains had an acceptable internal consistency of Cronbach alpha at 0.82 and 0.72, respectively.(7) The items in the practice domain had acceptable reliability of Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR20) at 0.80.(7)

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data was undertaken using the IBM SPSS statistic version 26.0. There were two outcomes in this study: the attitude and practice of anaemia management among pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinics. The median score of these outcome variables was reported as the data was not normally distributed. To examine the associated factors with attitude and practice of anaemia management among pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinics, the Pearson Chi-Square/Fisher exact test was used for bivariate analysis and multiple logistic regression was used for multivariate analysis.

Testing for multicollinearity and assumptions was also carried out before multiple logistic regression analysis. Testing for multicollinearity of the independent variables was carried out by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF). There was no multicollinearity detected and the VIF ranged from 1.06 to 1.14. The tolerance level of 0.1 (=VIF 10) was used. The statistical significance in the final model was accepted at p-values equal to or less than 0.05. The model fitness was assessed using the Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness of fit test. The analysis with the

Hosmer-Lemeshow test showed a p-value of more than 0.05 (attitude domain:  $p=1.00$ , practice domain:  $p=0.55$ ), indicating an adequate model fit.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS

The response rate was 91.4% (361/395). Most of the respondents (76.3%) were aged more than 35 years. The median age was 30 years and gestation was 36 weeks. The majority (76.7%) were Malay ethnicity and married (98.1%). Meanwhile, more than half (52.4%) of the respondents had secondary and below education level, were unemployed (52.6%) and had a household income of less than RM5000 a month (57.3%).

The antenatal characteristics showed that 37.6% of the respondents have a BMI of 25.5 to 29.9 kg/m<sup>2</sup>. The majority (67.8%) were early bookers, less than 5 parity (96.1%), close spacing (71.5%) and had a baseline (88.1%) and current (85.6%) haemoglobin of more than 11.0g/dl respectively. While most (83.8%) had no haematological disease, complications during pregnancy (95.0%), history of miscarriage in the previous pregnancy (85.6%) and pre-pregnancy iron supplementation (54.6%), almost all (93.6%) were non-vegetarians. (Refer Table 1)

**Table 1: Demographic and antenatal characteristics of pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinic in the Kuala Langat district (N=361)**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Demographic</b>		
<b>Age</b>		
≤ 35 years	85	23.7
> 35 years	276	76.3
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Others	84	23.3
Malay	277	76.7
<b>Education level</b>		
Secondary and below	190	52.4
Diploma and above	171	47.6
<b>Occupation</b>		
Unemployed	190	52.6
Employed	171	47.4
<b>Income</b>		

≤ RM3000	207	57.3
> RM3000	154	42.7
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	7	1.9
Married	354	98.1
<b>Antenatal characteristics</b>		
<b>BMI (kg/m<sup>2</sup>)</b>		
< 18.5	15	4.2
18.5-24.9	117	32.4
25-29.9	136	37.6
≥30.0	93	25.8
<b>Booking gestation</b>		
Early booker	245	67.8
Late booker	116	32.2
<b>Booking haemoglobin (g/dl)</b>		
<11.0	43	11.9
≥11.0	318	88.1
<b>Current haemoglobin (g/dl)</b>		
<11.0	52	14.4
≥11.0	309	85.6
<b>Parity</b>		
< 5	347	96.1
≥ 5	14	3.9
<b>Spacing</b>		
< 2 years	258	71.5
≥ 2 years	103	28.5
<b>Haematological disease</b>		
No	303	83.8
Yes	58	16.2
<b>Complication during pregnancy</b>		
No	343	95.0
Yes	18	5.0
<b>History of miscarriage in the previous pregnancy</b>		
No	309	85.6
Yes	52	14.4
<b>Pre-pregnancy iron supplement</b>		
No	197	54.6
Yes	164	45.4
<b>Diet</b>		
Vegetarian	23	6.4
Non-vegetarian	338	93.6

The median score for the knowledge domain was 83.4%, the attitude domain was 35.0% and the practice domain was 76.4% respectively. The majority (83.1%) of the respondents attained a good knowledge score of more than 70%. However, the majority of 92.8% (n=335) of the respondents with a poor attitude score of below 70% while a quarter of 31.0% (n=112) of the respondents attained poor practice scores of below 70%. (Refer Table 2)

**Table 2: The level of knowledge, attitude and practice of anaemia management among pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinics in the Kuala Langat district**

Variable (Total score %)	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Knowledge</b>		
Poor (0-69)	61	16.9
Good (70-100)	300	83.1
<b>Attitude</b>		
Poor (0-69)	335	92.8
Good (70-100)	26	7.2
<b>Practice</b>		
Poor (0-69)	112	31.0
Good (70-100)	249	69.0

In the preliminary model, five factors: (1) age of more than 35 years, (2) education level of diploma and above, (3) household income of more than RM3000 (4) late bookers (5) complications during pregnancy were significantly associated with the poor attitude towards anaemia management. Three factors: (1) spacing, (2) pre-pregnancy iron supplement (3) good knowledge were significantly associated with the poor practice towards anaemia management. (Refer Table 3)

**Table 3: Univariate analysis of the Factors associated with the poor attitude and practice of iron deficiency anaemia management among pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinics in the Kuala Langat district**

Preliminary model (SLR)								
	Attitude domain				Practice domain			
	COR	95% CI		¶p-value	COR	95% CI		¶p-value
		Lower	Upper			Lower	Upper	
<b>Demographic</b>								
<b>Age</b>								
≤ 35 years	1.00				1.00			
> 35 years	0.38	0.16	0.89	<b>0.026</b>	0.57	0.32	1.00	0.050
<b>Ethnicity</b>								
Others	1.00				1.00			
Malay	0.67	0.27	1.69	0.397	1.23	0.73	2.07	0.429
<b>Education level</b>								
Secondary and below	1.00				1.00			
Diploma and above	3.77	1.26	11.34	<b>0.018</b>	1.09	0.69	1.70	0.718
<b>Occupation</b>								
Unemployed	1.00				1.00			

Employed	1.47	0.63	3.46	0.372	1.11	0.71	1.74	0.640
<b>Income</b>								
≤ RM3000	1.00				1.00			
> RM3000	4.15	1.59	10.79	<b>0.048</b>	1.14	0.73	1.80	0.567
<b>Marital status</b>								
Single	1.00				1.00			
Married	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01	0.999	1.12	0.20	6.23	0.894
<b>Antenatal characteristics</b>								
<b>BMI (kg/m<sup>2</sup>)</b>								
< 18.5	1.00				1.00			
18.5-24.9	1.95	0.60	6.33	0.265	0.65	0.36	1.18	0.156
25-29.9	1.20	0.33	4.39	0.783	0.75	0.41	1.39	0.358
≥30.0	3.39	0.56	20.36	0.183	0.50	0.16	1.56	0.232
<b>Booking gestation</b>								
Early booker	1.00				1.00			
Late booker	1.37	0.58	3.26	<b>0.047</b>	0.79	0.49	1.27	0.329
<b>Booking haemoglobin (g/dl)</b>								
<11.0	1.00				1.00			
≥11.0	1.46	0.33	6.48	0.615	1.08	0.55	2.14	0.817
<b>Current haemoglobin (g/dl)</b>								
<11.0	1.00				1.00			
≥11.0	1.76	0.40	7.76	0.454	0.50	0.24	1.03	0.059
<b>Parity</b>								
< 5	1.00				1.00			
≥ 5	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01	0.999	1.68	0.46	6.14	0.433
<b>Spacing</b>								
< 2 years	1.00				1.00			
≥ 2 years	1.39	0.57	3.38	0.471	0.51	0.32	0.82	<b>0.006</b>
<b>Haematological disease</b>								
No	1.00				1.00			
Yes	1.97	0.74	5.22	0.175	1.10	0.60	2.04	0.758
<b>Complication during pregnancy</b>								
No	1.00				1.00			
Yes	3.44	0.91	2.96	<b>0.040</b>	1.18	0.41	3.39	0.760
<b>History of Miscarriage in the previous pregnancy</b>								
No	1.00				1.00			
Yes	0.88	0.29	3.06	0.835	1.26	0.65	2.34	0.490
<b>Pre-pregnancy iron supplement</b>								
No	1.00				1.00			
Yes	2.40	0.99	5.81	0.053	1.60	1.11	2.53	<b>0.043</b>

<b>Diet</b>								
Vegetarian	1.00				1.00			
Non-vegetarian	0.68	0.09	5.29	0.712	0.68	0.29	1.63	0.388
<b>Knowledge</b>								
Poor (0-69)	1.00				1.00			
Good (70-100)	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01	0.999	2.18	1.24	3.83	<b>0.007</b>

SLR: Simple logistic regression  
95% CI: 95% confidence interval  
COR: Crude odd ratio  
†p-value <0.05

In the final model, two factors: (1) complications during pregnancy, and (2) booking gestation were significantly associated with the poor attitude towards anaemia management. (Refer Table 4) Pregnant women who had complications during pregnancy had 74% lower odds of poor attitude (AOR=0.26, 95% CI 0.07, 0.97, p<0.046) compared to those without complications. Pregnant women who were late bookers had 1.3 times higher odds of poor attitude (AOR=1.30, 95% CI 1.04, 1.62, p<0.022) compared to those who were early bookers. Three factors: (1) spacing, (2) pre-pregnancy iron supplement, and (3) knowledge were significantly associated with the poor practice towards anaemia management. (Refer Table 5) Pregnant women who had 2 years and more spacing had 1.97 times higher odds of poor practice in anaemia management (AOR=1.97, 95% CI 1.20, 3.25, p<0.008) compared to those with poor spacing. Pregnant women who were on pre-pregnancy iron supplements had 38% lower odds of poor practice (AOR=0.62, 95% CI 0.39, 1.00, p<0.049) compared to those not on supplements. Pregnant women who had good knowledge scores had 79% lower odds of poor practice (AOR=0.21, 95% CI 0.06, 0.74, p<0.015) compared to those with poor knowledge scores.

**Table 4: Multivariate analysis of the factors associated with the poor attitude toward anaemia management among pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinics in the Kuala Langat district (backwards and forward method)**

	AOR	Final model (MLR)		†p- value
		95% CI		
		Lower	Upper	
<b>Complication during pregnancy</b>				
No	1.00			

Yes	0.26	0.07	0.97	<b>0.046</b>
<b>Booking gestation</b>				
Early booking	1.00			
Late booking	1.30	1.04	1.62	<b>0.022</b>

MLR: Multiple logistic regression

95% CI: 95% confidence interval

AOR: Adjusted odd ratio

††p-value <0.05

**Table 5: Multivariate analysis of the factors associated with the poor practice of anaemia management among pregnant women attending primary healthcare clinics in the Kuala Langkat district (backwards and forward method)**

	AOR	Final model (MLR)		††p- value
		95% CI		
		Lower	Upper	
<b>Spacing</b>				
< 2 years	1.00			
≥ 2 years	1.97	1.20	3.25	<b>0.008</b>
<b>Pre-pregnancy iron supplement</b>				
No	1.00			
Yes	0.62	0.39	1.00	<b>0.049</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>				
Poor (0-69)	1.00			
Good (70-100)	0.21	0.06	0.74	<b>0.015</b>

MLR: Multiple logistic regression

95% CI: 95% confidence interval

AOR: Adjusted odd ratio

††p-value <0.05

## DISCUSSION

Presently, there is still a scarcity pertaining studies on anemia in pregnancy among our population in Malaysia. In our study, we found that the proportion of pregnant women with good knowledge scores was high (83.1%). This is in contrast with studies done elsewhere in some parts of India, Saudi Arabia and Euthopia whereby the majority of their knowledge was found to be poor.(9–12) However, consistent with local studies conducted in Terengganu, Putrajaya and Perak with similar knowledge components being assessed, the majority had good knowledge scores.(7,13,14) Nevertheless in some other parts of Terengganu, the majority of their knowledge scores were average.(15,16) Despite the average to good knowledge of anemia among most pregnant women, it is still of utmost importance to continue

educational intervention to further increase and improve their knowledge.(15) In addition, good knowledge is crucial to ensure continuous adherence to iron therapy.(17)

Despite the good knowledge among the pregnant women, the majority (92.8%) had poor attitude scores. However, other studies done elsewhere in Saudi Arabia, India, locally in Putrajaya and some parts of Terengganu had shown their attitude scores to be average to good.(7,12,14,18) Similarly, in the state of Perak, only a quarter (39%) of the pregnant women had good attitude scores.(13) This discrepancy needs to be scrutinized to explain the poor attitude among our pregnant women. To address the problem of anemia, primary care providers play a crucial role whereby health promotion strategies that will positively impact the attitude should be incorporated to succour a positive health-related behaviour during pregnancy, which predominantly determines the pregnancy's outcomes.(18,19)

Our study also demonstrated that complications during pregnancy and booking gestation were significantly associated with poor attitudes among pregnant women. Presently, we could not find literatures which probed into these components. Nevertheless, these components are essential to be included in the assessment because a well-recognized and appropriate element of attitude and self-care would prevent or delay complications and the likelihood of pregnancy-related early death.(20) Looking into early antenatal booking, which is defined as before 12 weeks of gestation has been shown to produce favorable pregnancy outcomes and those with sufficient knowledge on the importance of early antenatal booking will result in good attitudes and practices among them.(21) Therefore, this is where again the primary care providers play an important role in the community, as they have a better understanding of local population lifestyles and beliefs which might affect a woman's knowledge and attitude towards antenatal care.(21) Primary care providers are the bridge between the community and the health care system while reinforcing health literacy.(21) Training should be initiated for primary care providers to identify these pregnant women, counsel and tackle the problem of poor attitudes among them in the community.(21)

We found that more than a quarter of the pregnant women (31.0%) attained poor practice scores. Consistent with previous studies abroad in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Nigeria and some parts of Ethiopia 24% to 52% had poor to moderate practices.(9,12,19,22) However locally in the state Perak, 25.5% of the pregnant women had poor practices.(13) In addition we found three factors to be significantly associated with the poor practices; spacing, intake of pre-pregnancy iron supplement and knowledge. Previous studies abroad did not probe into the factors associated with practices. However, local studies conducted in Putrajaya and Perak state had shown no significant association between the intake of iron supplements and knowledge of the practices.(7,13) The discrepancies in findings among various states locally need to be further explored. These results also implied that there is still a need to ameliorate the practices among pregnant women and this could be achieved by improving their knowledge on anemia.

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the study underscores a significant issue. Although our pregnant population generally possesses adequate knowledge about anemia, there is a notable deficiency in their attitudes and practices regarding its management. Despite good awareness, there is a disconnection in translating this knowledge into effective anemia management. This gap is consequential, as poor attitudes are linked to pregnancy complications and delayed prenatal care. Factors such as spacing pregnancies beyond two years, lack of pre-pregnancy iron supplements, and even possessing good knowledge are identified in this study as contributors to suboptimal practices. These findings emphasize the critical need to address these gaps in managing this vital medical condition during pregnancy to reduce associated morbidity and mortality. Consequently, primary healthcare providers emerge as key players in enhancing and fortifying the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of pregnant women through targeted health education strategies.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

This study obtained ethical approval from the medical research ethics committee of Malaysia (RSCH ID-23-00256-KOQ) and followed current regulations on the protection of personal data.

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