EPIDEMIOLOGY OF HEPATITIS B AND HEPATITIS C VIRUSES AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN AT QUEEN ELIZABETH CENTRAL HOSPITAL (QECH), MALAWI

Nkhata CB[1], Mvula MN[1], Kalongonda MM[1], Masamba M[1,2], Shawa IT[1]

1. *University of Malawi College of Medicine, P/Bag 360, Blantyre3, Malawi.*
2. *Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, Obstetrics and Gynaecology Department, P.O. Box 95, Blantyre Malawi.*

Background

Viral Hepatitis is a serious public health concern globally with deaths estimated at 1.4 million annually due to liver fibrosis, cirrhosis, and hepatocellular carcinoma. Hepatitis B and C are the most common viruses that cause liver damage. However, the majority of infected individuals are unaware of their serostatus. Viral hepatitis has contributed to maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality. There is no updated data on the Epidemiology of hepatitis B and C among pregnant mothers in Malawi.

Methods

The study was designed to assess the epidemiology of Hepatitis B and C viruses among pregnant women at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among pregnant women at QECH in last quarter of 2021. Of the 114 pregnant women, 96 participants were consented and enrolled using a convenient sampling technique. 12 participants were dropped due to various reasons; therefore 84 completed the study. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect socio-demographic and behavior characteristics to assess the risk of exposure. Serum was processed from venous blood samples and tested for HBsAg and Anti-HCV markers utilizing Rapid screening assays for screening and Enzyme Linked Immunosorbent Assay for confirmatory.

Results

A total of 84 pregnant consenting pregnant women participated in the study, with 1.2% (n=1/84) testing positive for HBsAg and nobody had detectable anti-HCV antibodies. There was no significant link between HBV and HCV in any of the socio-demographic data or putative risk variables.

Conclusion

The findings indicate a viral hepatitis prevalence lower than the set range by the WHO. This suggests that HBV and HCV are rare in pregnant women at QECH. Nevertheless, accessible screening for all pregnant women should be provided. The prevention of MTCT is key for reduction and prevention of the global burden of chronic viral hepatitis.

Disclosure of interest

None to declare