OPEN ACCESS

Saudi Journal of Nursing and Health Care

Abbreviated Key Title: Saudi J Nurs Health Care
ISSN 2616-7921 (Print) |ISSN 2616-6186 (Online)
Scholars Middle East Publishers, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
Journal homepage: https://saudijournals.com

Review Article

Maternal Health and Preeclampsia Prevention: A Community-Based Approach

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.36348/sjnhc.2025.v08i09.003 | **Received:** 07.06.2025 | **Accepted:** 12.08.2025 | **Published:** 13.09.2025

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Abstract

Preeclampsia is a major contributor to maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality worldwide. Effective community-based strategies can significantly mitigate its impact. This review highlights evidence-based interventions for preeclampsia prevention, emphasizing early risk detection, lifestyle and dietary modifications, health education, and the role of local healthcare policies. A multidisciplinary approach that integrates the efforts of healthcare professionals, policy-makers, and communities is essential to reduce the burden of this condition and improve maternal and neonatal outcomes.

Keywords: Preeclampsia, maternal health, community health, antenatal care, hypertensive disorders, dietary modification, health education.

INTRODUCTION

Preeclampsia is a pregnancy-specific hypertensive disorder typically occurring after 20 weeks of gestation, marked by elevated blood pressure and proteinuria. It presents significant risks for both the mother and fetus, often resulting in complications such as eclampsia, preterm delivery, and intrauterine growth restriction. The disorder remains a leading cause of maternal mortality, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where healthcare access is limited.

In India, the prevalence of preeclampsia ranges from 4.5% to 15%, with studies in Karnataka reporting an incidence of approximately 10.3%. Despite medical advances, the burden of preeclampsia remains high, calling for robust, community-centered preventive strategies.

Risk Identification and Early Screening

Early identification of at-risk women is essential to prevent preeclampsia-related complications. Community health workers play a pivotal role in conducting initial assessments and encouraging antenatal care attendance. Common risk factors include:

- Primigravida (first pregnancy)
- Personal or family history of preeclampsia
- Chronic hypertension, renal disease, or diabetes mellitus
- Obesity
- Multiple pregnancies
- Advanced maternal age
- Autoimmune disorders (e.g., lupus, antiphospholipid syndrome)

Regular antenatal visits involving blood pressure checks and urine protein tests should be promoted at the grassroots level. Additionally, low-cost screening tools like the Roll-Over Test and Doppler ultrasound for uterine artery blood flow can assist in risk stratification. Health workers must be trained to identify early warning signs and refer high-risk cases promptly for clinical evaluation.

Lifestyle Modifications

Promoting healthy lifestyle habits is a cornerstone of preeclampsia prevention. Community-based initiatives should advocate for:

- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight
- Engaging in moderate physical activity
- Avoiding tobacco and alcohol
- Managing psychological stress
- Ensuring adequate rest and sleep

Community interventions—such as prenatal wellness groups, counseling sessions, and support networks—can motivate behavioral change, especially in underserved regions.

Dietary Interventions

Nutrition plays a vital role in maternal health. Dietary modifications shown to reduce preeclampsia risk include:

- Ensuring adequate calcium intake
- Reducing sodium consumption
- Promoting a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Encouraging omega-3 fatty acid consumption
- Administering prophylactic low-dose aspirin and folic acid in high-risk cases, as per clinical guidelines

Nutrition education programs led by community health personnel can raise awareness and improve dietary practices, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged populations.

Community Health Education

Health education is a key driver in raising awareness and promoting preventive practices. Community health workers, midwives, and local leaders should be engaged to deliver education on:

- Importance of timely antenatal care
- Early symptoms of preeclampsia (e.g., swelling, headaches, visual disturbances)
- Adherence to prescribed medications and supplements
- Birth preparedness and complication readiness
- Utilization of mobile health (mHealth) platforms for health updates and remote consultations

Programs like India's National Rural Health Mission have played a pivotal role in improving maternal health. Expanding such initiatives to include focused education on hypertensive disorders during pregnancy could further enhance outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Preeclampsia remains under recognized at the community level, often perceived as an unrelated hypertension or seizure disorder. Strengthening community awareness and integrating screening, lifestyle interventions, and nutrition with public health infrastructure can significantly reduce the incidence and severity of preeclampsia.

A holistic, community-based approach—emphasizing early identification, behavioral changes, and comprehensive maternal support—can bridge existing healthcare gaps. Investment in healthcare education, policy integration, and workforce training will be vital to achieving long-term improvements in maternal and neonatal health outcomes.

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