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Suicide is the number one cause of death among pregnant women in Anuradhapura District (2007-2009)

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Objective: This study was designed to find out the escaped deaths of pregnant mothers in Anuradhapura district from the records.

Method: Data were collected from maternal death review reports from the RDHS office in Anuradhapura district (AD) during May –July 2011. Unpublished data from 2007- 2009 were available. Sri Lankan data on suicide deaths in pregnancy was released by Family Health bureau (FHB) on request.

Results:Total number of pregnancy related deaths in years 2007-2009 was 40. Three most common causes of death: Suicide 9, PPH 6, heart Disease complicating pregnancy 5 and one death due to septic abortion. Suicide is the number one cause of pregnancy related deaths in AD. The time of suicide had been before the 28 weeks of gestation in 6 of these women. Seven out of 9 suicides were among primi paraous women. Three of them were unmarried. Six of these women had committed suicide by ingesting poison. Age ranged from 19-35years. FHB statistics in 2007 and 2008 show a total number of maternal deaths of 281 and 56 suicide deaths related to pregnancy.

Conclusion: Suicides in pregnancy are the escaped maternal deaths in AD. Pregnancy deaths due to suicides are not published at annual MMR statistics.

In the WHO definition of maternal deaths, suicides are categorized as “accidental or incidental cause”. Therefore suicides are not included in the MMR. There is a need to give more attention to suicides among pregnant mothers in Sri Lanka.