

Background to the study

South Sudan has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world (2,054 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, each mother has a 1/7 chance of dying during delivery in her life time. Access to antenatal care at Jale, Kajo Keji County in South Sudan is more limited than in other rural settings.

Objective of the study

The main objective of this study was to determine the factors affecting utilization of antenatal care services at Jale, Kajo-Keji County in South Sudan.

Results

A total of 220 women participated in the study. Majority (24%) were of 18-24 years, married (53%) and of primary education. 82% of mothers agreed that utilizing ANC services would save the baby and mother's life as well as helping the mother to have a safe delivery, 78% of the mothers feared to attend ANC because of male nurses 14% of mothers attended ANC during the last pregnancy. 60% of the mothers reported to have visited the health facility and failed to get someone to attend to them. Mothers of 40-49 of age were 1.2 times more likely to use ANC services than those of 18-24 years (IRR=1.2, CI=1.02-1.4; p-value=0.047). Mothers not knowledgeable about ANC were 0.6 time less likely to utilize ANC services than those who had adequate knowledge, (IRR=0.6, CI=0.3-0.9; p-value=0.007). While those with relative knowledge towards ANC services were 0.9times less likely to use ANC services (IRR=0.9, CI=0.8-0.9; p-value=0.030). Women who believed that screaming during delivery was harmful to their babies were 0.7 times less likely to utilize ANC services (IRR = 0.7 CI =0.6 – 1.0; p- value= 0.025) and women who feared male nurses were 0.5 times less likely to utilize ANC services (IRR = 0.5 CI= 0.4 – 1.1; p- value= 0.041).

Conclusion

Utilization of ANC services in Jale is very low; lower than the national average. ANC service users are more likely to be older women and those knowledgeable about ANC. Fear of male nurses and considering screaming at birth a taboo were the cultural factors affecting utilization of ANC services. Long distances to health facility, inadequate skilled staff at the health facility, and frequent stock outs of essential medicines were the most common health service challenges compromising the utilization of ANC services.

Recommendations

There is need for a massive campaign in the area to increase the awareness and knowledge of the community at ANC.

The government of South Sudan has to increase the availability of medicines and health workers in health facilities so that those mothers who have attempt to go to the health facilities are offered appropriate ANC.

Cultural leaders in Jale must be involved in ANC programs so that they influence potential users of ANC services.

There is need to investigate further the cultural norms affecting the utilization of ANC services.