

Background

The *Narrating Blood network* is an international transdisciplinary research network at the University of Sussex exploring the impact of hidden blood-related conditions on social, economic and health welfare in Ghana, India and Bangladesh¹. Health inequalities are a major concern in development policies. The research will examine the inequalities of health care systems related to blood-related conditions and will inform future work of the network.

Anaemia is the blood narrative at the forefront of public health discourse in most low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)². It poses a global public health issue. In order to address this issue, it is important to understand sociocultural perspectives on blood.



Community health worker in Dhaka, Bangladesh testing haemoglobin levels (Source: Maya Unnithan)

Aims and Objectives

- How are blood-related health conditions in Ghana linked to health inequalities in the care system?
- identify health inequalities in Ghana comparing it with India and Bangladesh
- analyse understandings of blood-related conditions as complex health issues and key current policy concerns
- prepare a report on the current situation of the health care system in Ghana for the forthcoming visit to Ghana by Sussex network members

Methods

- discourse analysis of reports, articles, policies, case studies
- annotated bibliographies, summarising key articles on anaemia in Ghana and anaemia/reproductive health and climate change
- Ghana country report, including background information for research visit to Ghana
- revised research briefing for Narrating Blood network
- secondary data analysis, using data from network members research visits
- skype discussions with researchers from Ghana & Bangladesh



Manual used by communal health workers in Andhra Pradesh, India (Source: Maya Unnithan)

Discussion

Anaemia in adolescents and young mothers is not adequately addressed through policies and programmes³. Involving community members and looking at anaemia through an interdisciplinary approach enables new initiatives in how to tackle this health issue cross-nationally. Education on health and nutrition is especially important and should be the focus of interventions. Furthermore, the challenges arising from the climate crisis are having an impact on anaemia. The connections between poverty, inequality, and access to health linked to anaemia are crucial in order to understand the full scope of this problem.



Survey-taking in a community in Ghana (Source: SPRING, 2016)

In Ghana anaemia prevalence is high with 66% of children aged 6-59 months having anaemia and 42% of women in the reproductive age (15-49 years)⁴. Malaria, helminthic infections, and micronutrient deficiency are the main drivers of anaemia in Ghana. Pregnant women with malaria and HIV co-infection are at a twice as high risk of anaemia compared to pregnant women with one infection or none.

There are great regional disparities of anaemia with the northern regions being most affected (Northern = 82%; Upper East = 73.8%; Upper West = 73.8%). Ghana's anaemia strategy involves Iron fortification, Micronutrient supplement, Mean Corpuscular Haemoglobin (MCH), Deworming, Bed nets, Water and Sanitation⁵.

Conclusions

- anaemia is not addressed enough in adolescent girls or young mothers, more work is needed
- inequalities in access to health care affect blood-related disorders in Ghana, India, and Bangladesh
- policies need to take into account cultural understandings and work closely with community health providers
- anaemia is intimately linked to climate change, this is an important area with new studies emerging

References

- ¹ Narrating Blood website (http://www.sussex.ac.uk/corth/research/narrating_blood)
² Yasutake, 2013. Anemia among Adolescent and Young Women in Low-and-Middle- Income Countries.
³ Akua Agyepong, I., Koryo Wellington, E., Ablordey Abbey, M., 1997. A comparative study of clinical and sociocultural aspects of anaemia among adolescent girls in rural Ghana.
⁴ Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), Ghana Health Service (GHS), and ICF International. 2015. Ghana Demographic and Health Survey 2014.
⁵ SPRING, Ghana Health Service. 2016. Ghana: Landscape Analysis of Anemia and Anemia Programming.



Narrating Blood website