

Exploring the antenatal care challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in rural areas of Indonesia: a qualitative study

Publons ID	(not set)
Wos ID	WOS:000953329900005
Doi	10.1186/s12884-023-05495-8
Title	Exploring the antenatal care challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in rural areas of Indonesia: a qualitative study
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Publish Date	MAR 16 2023
Journal Name	BMC PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH
Citation	
Abstract	<p>IntroductionThe COVID-19 pandemic affected almost all healthcare services in Indonesia, including antenatal care (ANC). Pregnant women were a vulnerable group during the pandemic since the Indonesian government's policies at the time influenced the delivery of ANC services, particularly in rural areas. Investigating the ANC challenges faced during the pandemic from the perspectives of pregnant women and healthcare providers is important for our understanding of ANC provision. This study, therefore explores barriers to ANC appointments faced during the COVID-19 pandemic in rural areas of Indonesia from the perspectives of pregnant women and health care providers.MethodsThis was a qualitative exploratory descriptive study involving 31 participants, consisting of 25 pregnant women and six healthcare providers who were selected via a purposive sampling method. Thadeus and Maine's Three Delays Model was used as the theoretical framework. Data were collected between March and August 2021, through two focus group discussions (FGDs), ten in-depth interviews, and field notes. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis method.ResultsThree themes describing barriers to ANC during the COVID-19 pandemic in rural areas of Indonesia emerged from this study. Those themes were: (1) The fear of being infected with COVID-19, related to anxiety, perceived vulnerability, and the desire to protect oneself and loved ones; (2) The stay-at-home policy, related to transport barriers and restricted social activity; and (3) Re-designed ANC services, related to ANC adjustments, high-risk pregnancies, insufficient information, and adherence to COVID-19 preventive behaviors.ConclusionBased on the Three Delays Model, several challenges to carrying out ANC during the COVID-19 pandemic in rural areas of Indonesia were identified. These findings demonstrate the need to formulate and implement ANC packages to facilitate pregnant women's access to health care services.</p>
Publish Type	Journal
Publish Year	2023
Page Begin	(not set)
Page End	(not set)
Issn	
Eissn	1471-2393
Url	https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/full-record/WOS:000953329900005
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