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Prevalence of Anemia among San Women and Young Children in Rural Botswana

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C'oam xiriba gaise kai---tama. Tsaatsa semko, a gaise xlaaxla setama. Wiitetu! “My child is not growing well, he is sickly. At school he is getting nowhere, he is just repeating grades, Please, help me”, with eyes full of expectation Xhukuri a young pregnant San mother shared her struggles with our research team. My heart sank!! Could it be anemia? I wondered.

Anemia is threatening the lives of San women and children in rural Botswana. **What is anemia? Who are the San People?**

Anemia occurs when there is a lack of enough healthy red blood cells to carry adequate oxygen to the body's tissues. It has a myriad of causes which includes some micronutrient deficiencies such as iron and folate, infections like malaria and cancer and some inherited genetic disorders such as the sickle cell disease.

The San People also known as the Bushmen or Basarwa are the Indigenous Peoples of Southern Africa found in Botswana and other neighbouring countries. Apart from their well-known distinctive cultures there are suggestions that they may be the oldest human ancestors.

Generally, in Botswana, little is known about their health. So, to address this knowledge gap, we assessed the prevalence of anemia among women of childbearing-age and young children in the Ghanzi District where they primarily reside.

- We analysed Hemoglobin (Hb) concentrations of 367 mother-child pairs in nine randomly selected areas.

We found out that:

- **42%** of all children were anemic.
- **13% of all women were anemic;** The burden was higher among **pregnant women**.
- **Sanitation** was also a problem, about 70% of the households lacked access to household toilets.
- **56%** of the women reported **smoking** in some form.

So, why do we care? We are concerned because anemia has devastating health and economic impacts.

- In children, it **increases susceptibility to infections** and **impairs growth and cognitive development** which **compromise academic ability**.

- In reproductive women like Xhukuri anemia **reduces productivity and work capacity** and **heightens the risks for miscarriages and maternal mortality**.

We, therefore, hope that our findings will **inform**, and **guide targeted** and **culturally-appropriate health and nutrition policies** for the San People and other Indigenous Peoples globally. **qei tcqaor ko!** Thank you!!!!