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Pregnant women: What do they need to know during pregnancy? A descriptive study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Antenatal education programs provide women with essential knowledge and skills in various aspects of maternal and fetal health. Antenatal education is based on improving women's health, reducing the risks of complications and enhancing couples' positive experience during childbirth. There is a lack of formal antenatal educational programs based on women's needs in Jordan.

Aim: This study sought to identify and prioritize the learning needs for women during pregnancy.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional design was employed. The study sample was recruited from three maternal and child health centers. Data were collected from a convenient sample of 150 pregnant women during their antenatal visits. One hundred and twenty three participants (response rate = 82%) completed the self-reported antenatal learning needs questionnaire.

Findings: Women identified their most important learning needs were related to managing major complications of pregnancy (mean = 3.49, SD = 0.78), investigations and physician follow-up visit during pregnancy (mean = 3.42, SD = 0.71), appropriate diet (mean = 3.36, SD = 0.84) and information about medication and supplements (mean = 3.22, SD = 0.97). Spearman correlation showed negative association between participants' age and physical ($r = -0.536, p = 0.015$) and emotional concerns ($r = -0.490, p = 0.001$). Women who had a diploma or higher degree reported greater concern regarding physical (median = 4.00, IQR = 3.00–4.00, $p = 0.047$) and emotional changes (median = 3.33, IQR = 3.00–4.00, $p = 0.004$). Finally, migrant participants showed greater significant concern regarding emotional changes and coping with minor complications.

Conclusion: A large proportion of pregnant women in this study reported a high degree of importance of specific learning topics that were closely relevant to their current period of pregnancy. The lack of focusing on issues related to maternal emotional status and possible complications suggests a need for a national strategy to provide antenatal education based on women's perceptions of their needs.

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Statement of significance:

Problem

Lack of formal educational programs based on women's needs in Jordan.

What is already known

- Many developed countries have antenatal educational programs established in partnership with women.

- A lack of antenatal educational program exists in developing countries such as Jordan.
- Antenatal programs do not meet the needs of women in many developing countries.

What this paper adds

- Recognition and management of possible complications during pregnancy was a major concern for women in this study.
- Useful information and strategies from women's perspectives for the planning, development and implementation of antenatal educational programs.
- The urgent need to develop a national strategy to provide a formal program of antenatal education in Jordan.

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1. Introduction

Pregnancy is an important transitional period in a new parent's life, and appropriate antenatal care, information and advice are important for new parents. The experience of having a new baby presents numerous challenges for women, as they deal with the physical and emotional postnatal changes associated with childbirth, and resume most aspects of their previous life roles.²⁷

The aims of antenatal care are to optimize maternal and fetal health, to improve women's experience of pregnancy and birth, and to prepare women for motherhood.¹⁶ Antenatal education programs provide women with the opportunity to gain essential knowledge and skills in different aspects of maternal and fetal health. The positive outcomes of antenatal education are clearly evident in the literature,²¹ however provision of antenatal education that is not based on women's needs and clinical evidence has provoked a question about the effectiveness of antenatal classes, more particularly in developing countries.^{2,12,18,26}

Studies support the need for well established antenatal education based on women's needs.^{8,18} Identifying the learning needs for pregnant women is fundamental to understanding the nature and extent of the issues relevant for local birthing women, prior to developing educational interventions. It can also provide a framework for evaluating existing educational programs.¹⁴ Learning needs assessment is usually conducted as a necessary step to develop childbirth preparation programs in developed countries.^{8,27,25} However, this is not the case in some developing countries, such as Jordan, where the existing antenatal education programs are not based on women's perceptions of their own needs.^{25,13}

2. Literature review

Worldwide literature regarding the assessment of learning needs during pregnancy is limited. A Canadian multi-methods study was conducted by Dumas⁸ to design a customized, uniform antenatal educational program based on parents' and professionals' needs. The author found that the most important topics, as considered by health care providers and future parents, to be covered during pregnancy classes included: physiological changes, minor discomforts during pregnancy, and lifestyle habits and their impact on the fetus, and psychological changes for each parent. Some studies have found that not meeting women's learning needs during pregnancy, is a risk factor for low confidence on being a parent with a new baby, increased anxiety and social isolation.^{25,6}

Within the Jordanian context, there is a scarcity of formal antenatal education.¹⁹ Jordanian women therefore rely primarily on personal resources, rather than health care services, to meet their learning needs and address their concerns. Historically, Jordanian women met their pregnancy concerns through their extended families and their communities. However, modern Jordanian families are facing new challenges a shift from living with extended families to living as a nuclear family. In the light of these changes in Jordanian communities and the lack of formal educational programs based on women's needs, this study sought to identify and prioritize the learning needs of women during pregnancy. Therefore, this study aimed to address the following questions: (1) What are women's perceived learning needs during the pregnancy period? (2) What are the differences in perceived learning needs based on pregnancy trimesters? (3) What are the associations between women's socio-demographic characteristics and their perception of learning needs? And (4) What are the preferred teaching methods that can be used to teach women?

3. Methodology

3.1. Study design and population

A descriptive cross-sectional design with questionnaire survey was employed. Data were collected from a convenient sample at Maternal and Child Health (MCH) centers in the south of Jordan (Al-Karak governance). Women who were physically healthy, free from complications and able to communicate (read and write) in Arabic were included in the study. The targeted sample size was 150 pregnant women, 120 plus 30 (25% attrition rate). This sample size was calculated based on power 80% and $\alpha = 0.05$. In addition, this sample size is in the line with previous studies.^{4,22}

3.2. Study settings

The study sample was recruited from three MCH centers in Alkarak city.

3.3. Research instrument

The research instrument consists of two parts. The first part is about socio-demographic characteristics, including information on the woman's age, educational level, working status, history of spontaneous abortions and/or miscarriages, stage of pregnancy (1st, 2nd or 3rd trimester), type(s) of previous birth, and number of living children. The second part of the instrument is the antenatal learning needs scale. The scale was developed based on previous literature^{3,24,8,27,4} and the opinions of experts from the maternal health nursing field. A panel of associate professors in maternal health care and clinical experts confirmed the content validity of the scale. In addition, the scale was introduced to a group of five pregnant women to check the suitability and clarity of the scale's items. Once ethical approval had been granted from the relevant health services and university ethics committee, a pilot study of 25 women was conducted. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale in this study was 0.92, and it ranged from 0.82 to 0.96 in all the subscales.

The antenatal learning needs scale contained 33 items. Using a likert scale, each item was rated from 0 (does not apply), 1 (of no importance) to 4 (extremely important). These 33 items were divided into ten subscales: physical (2 items), emotional (3 items), nutritional (3 items), physical exercise (3 items), medication (7 items), type of investigations (2 items) and stage of fetal development (1 item), employment (2 items), smoking (4 items), management of minor discomfort (4 items), and recognition and management of major complications (2 items).

The final part of the questionnaire asked women to rate their level of satisfaction with their current antenatal health education. Satisfaction level was ranked from 1 (poor satisfaction) to 10 (very satisfied). In addition, women were asked about their preferred teaching methods and their preferred person to provide health education during pregnancy.

3.4. Ethical consideration and data collection process

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the research ethics committee at Mutah University (6/23122013) and from the Ministry of Health (MBI 2761/20022014). The researcher recruited two research assistants who had bachelor degrees in nursing and worked as clinical instructors in the university. To ensure accuracy and consistency among members of the research team in different settings, workshops were held for the research assistants to explain the research purpose and the data collection process.

Research assistants approached eligible women at the three MCH centers, and provided verbal information about the study purpose, and a written information sheet. Once women's questions

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