



Research Brief

Factors associated with the need for information about medicines among pregnant women – A multinational internet-based survey

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Abstract

Background: Women frequently experience health problems and use medicines during pregnancy, and thus need information about their medicines. Knowledge about factors associated with medicine information needs is important for pharmacists when tailoring medication counseling for these pregnant women.

Objectives: The aim was to investigate how socioeconomic factors, health literacy, health status, and use of medicines are associated with the need for drug information among pregnant women.

Methods: A cross-sectional internet-based survey was posted using the Questback program (www.questback.com) on 1–4 websites commonly used by pregnant women in the participating countries within the Americas, Europe, and Australia. Multivariate logistic regression analysis was used. Logistic regression analysis was used for multivariate analysis when measuring the association of maternal socio-demographics and health-related characteristics with the need for medicines information.

Results: A higher need for medicines information was associated with primiparity (OR 1.56, CI 1.40–1.75), age of 35+ years (OR 1.26, CI 1.03–1.54), university education (OR 1.33, CI 1.17–1.51), low health literacy (OR 1.96, CI 1.50–2.55), use of medication for chronic diseases (OR 2.67, CI 2.28–3.13), use of medication for acute illnesses (OR 1.88, CI 1.64–2.15), use of OTCs (2+ OTC medicines, OR 1.87, CI 1.60–2.20), use of herbal preparations (OR 1.57, CI 1.37–1.80), and region of residence in Eastern Europe (OR 2.36, CI 2.00–2.79) and Northern Europe (OR 1.26, CI 1.10–1.44).

Conclusions: The need for medicines information among pregnant women increases with the number of health problems and use of both prescription and OTC medicines as well as herbal preparations. Women with lower health literacy express a higher need for medicines information. These groups are primary targets for intensified counseling.

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Background

Women frequently experience health problems during pregnancy and up to 8 out of 10 women report using medicines.^{1,2} Thus, it is not surprising that some 40–80% of pregnant women have information needs about medicine use during their pregnancy.^{2–5} The internet has made it possible for pregnant women to access relevant information to a much greater extent than before. In addition to health care personnel, the Internet is today widely used by pregnant women to seek medicines information.⁵ The critical factors are the motivation to actively seek information and the ability to critically examine and act on the available information.

Only two previous studies have studied which factors are associated with the need of medicines information among pregnant women.^{3,4} Both of these studies were done in local and selected study populations (in the Netherlands and in the USA) and the other study³ is 20-years old. Considering the availability of medicines information and the increase of electronic medicines information tools in the recent years, an update and validation of findings is needed. According to these previous studies, being married and using medicines seem to be associated with the need for information, but maternal age or ethnicity is not.^{3,4} However, the associations of other background factors included, i.e., parity and education, resulted in contradictory results in these studies. Furthermore, the associations of many factors – such as health literacy, experienced health disorders or chronic diseases as well as use of Over-the-Counter-medicines, prescription medicines or herbal preparation – with medicines information needs have not previously been evaluated. Thus, there is a need to assess information needs in different populations and according to their background factors to be able to tailor and target medicines information.

Objectives

The aim of this study was to investigate the association between socioeconomic factors, health status, health literacy, use of medicines and herbal products with the need for medicines information among pregnant women in different regions of the world.

Methods

This study is part of a multinational internet-based survey study about Medication Use in

Pregnancy targeting pregnant women and new mothers.⁶ It was conducted in 5 regions: the Americas (Canada, USA and South America), Australia, Eastern Europe (Croatia, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia), Northern Europe (Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) and Western Europe (Austria, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom).

A questionnaire was posted using the Questback program (www.questback.com) on one to four websites commonly used by pregnant women in the participating countries. These websites were chosen by the national coordinators.⁶ A convenience sample of responses was gained.

The questionnaire was first developed in Norwegian and English and then translated into the other relevant languages. A pilot study in four countries ($n = 47$) elicited no major changes. The questionnaire was accessible during a period of two months between 1 October 2011 and 29 February 2012 in each country. The participants were specifically instructed to answer the questions related to their current or latest pregnancy. No personally identifiable information was collected and answering the survey was considered to be giving informed consent. The ethics approval was granted by the Norwegian Regional Ethics Committee.

The questionnaire included questions related to medicine use and health during pregnancy, attitudes toward using medicines, and need for medicines information. The question “Did you need information about medicines during the course of your pregnancy?” assessed the need for information. The measures for background variables are shown in Table 1. All variables were categorized as presented in Table 2. The complete questionnaire is presented elsewhere.⁶

The data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 21 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Cross-tabulations and Pearson’s chi-square test were used when analyzing categorical variables. A P value of < 0.05 was considered to be statistically significant. Logistic regression analysis (ORs together with their 95% confidence intervals (CIs)) was used for multivariate analysis when measuring the association of maternal socio-demographics and health-related characteristics with the need for medicines information. The variables were selected in the final model using the stepwise method (forward conditional). Health disorders experienced (Cramér’s $V = 0.342$, $P < 0.001$) and number of chronic diseases (Cramér’s $V = 0.785$, $P < 0.001$) correlated with medication

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