



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Analysis of prenatal abuse in Catalonia between the years 2011 and 2014[☆]

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KEYWORDS

Prenatal abuse;
Foetal abuse;
Illicit drugs and pregnancy;
Social problems;
Maternal behaviour;
Risk indicators

Abstract

Introduction: Foetal abuse is that intentional or negligent act that causes a harmful effect to the foetus. It is a type of abuse difficult to diagnose and handle. Some indicators of suspicion are the absence of gestational control, the maternal consumption of toxic substances, or the problematic maternal social environment.

Objective: To analyse the cases of foetal abuse registered in Catalonia between 2011 and 2014 to identify the risk profile.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted on a sample of 222 cases of prenatal abuse registered in Catalonia between 2011 and 2014.

Results: The mean maternal age was 28.11 years, with 63% of Spanish nationality, 76% were unemployed, 60% had not followed correct gestational control, 76% had previous pregnancy interruptions, 20% reported to have been mistreated by the partner, had history of social problems (76% social intervention, 30.5% previous child retention, 13% custody of the mother by the administration, 7% deprivation of liberty), with high rates of mother-to-child transmission of infection (HIV 4.95%, HCV 9%, HIV + HCV co-infection 1.8%), and 73% reported toxic use (in order of frequency, cannabis, cocaine and heroin). In newborns, the rate of prematurity (26.3%) is highlighted, as well as the diagnosis of withdrawal syndrome in 34 cases. Just over half (51.6%) of the infants are currently with their mother.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Maltrato prenatal;
 Maltrato fetal;
 Drogas y embarazo;
 Problemática social;
 Comportamiento materno;
 Indicadores de riesgo

Conclusions: In our reference population with a diagnosis of prenatal abuse, there are high rates of maternal toxic consumption, HIV-HCV infection, unemployment, history of previous social intervention, and poor gestational control.

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Análisis del maltrato prenatal en Cataluña entre los años 2011 y 2014**Resumen**

Introducción: El maltrato prenatal es aquel acto intencionado o negligente que causa un efecto nocivo al feto. Es un tipo de maltrato difícil de diagnosticar y manejar. Algunos indicadores de sospecha son la ausencia de control gestacional, el consumo materno de tóxicos o la problemática social del entorno materno.

Objetivo: Analizar los casos de maltrato prenatal registrados en Cataluña entre 2011 y 2014 para identificar el perfil de riesgo.

Métodos: Estudio descriptivo de corte transversal de una muestra de 222 casos de maltrato prenatal registrados en Cataluña entre 2011 y 2014.

Resultados: La edad media materna fue de 28,11 años. El 63% de los casos eran de nacionalidad española, un 76% estaba sin trabajo, el 60% no había seguido un correcto control gestacional, un 76% tenía interrupciones de embarazo previas, un 20% manifestaba haber sido maltratada por la pareja. Fueron frecuente los antecedentes de problemática social (76% intervención social; 30,5% retenciones de hijos previos; 13% tutela de la madre por la administración; 7% privación de libertad), con tasas elevadas de infección por enfermedades de transmisión vertical (VIH 4,95%, VHC 9%, coinfección VIH + VHC 1,8%), el 73% manifestó consumo de tóxicos (por orden de frecuencia cannabis, cocaína y heroína). En los neonatos, destacó el alto índice de prematuridad (26,3%) y el diagnóstico de síndrome de abstinencia en 34 casos. En el 51,6% el hijo está en la actualidad con su madre.

Conclusiones: En nuestra población de referencia con diagnóstico de maltrato prenatal destacan unos índices elevados de consumo materno de tóxicos, infección por VIH-VHC, desempleo, antecedentes de intervención social previa y mal control gestacional.

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Introduction

Prenatal abuse is defined as the mother failing to take adequate care of her body, whether knowingly or not, consuming illicit substances or psychotropic drugs, or being physically abused by another party.^{1,2} This concept is still not well known, although it has been regulated by Catalan law since 2010 with the introduction of Law 14/2010 of May 27,³ which recognises the rights of the unborn child and places an unprecedented value on the foetus.

Some cases may be difficult to detect and risk indicators may be useful, such as the lack of prenatal care, the use of illegal substances, alcohol or psychotropic drugs without a prescription, unwanted pregnancy or indifference towards the pregnancy, a history of previous children in foster care, the presence of psychiatric disorders or untreated illnesses that may lead to congenital anomalies or infection in the foetus, physical abuse of the mother, maternal involvement in criminal activity or prostitution, or maternal neglect of her own body in terms of health, nutrition and hygiene. After birth, clinical manifestations of neonatal abstinence

syndrome (NAS) should be considered a red flag suggestive of potential prenatal abuse.^{2,4}

The consequences of prenatal abuse may be dire and alter the subsequent growth and development of the child. The potential deleterious effects on the foetus of drug exposure during gestation are well known, and include changes in neural proliferation, differentiation and migration, preterm birth, low birth weight, length and head circumference and NAS (with an increased incidence in newborns exposed to opiates). Potential postnatal consequences include psychomotor retardation and behavioural disorders. Furthermore, a history of prenatal abuse is a risk factor for future child abuse.^{5,6}

Pregnancy provides an opportunity to detect situations where there is a higher risk of prenatal abuse due to the increased contact with health care providers (midwives, obstetricians, nurses). Social workers, psychiatrists and professionals employed in substance use treatment and recovery services should assess any situation indicative of risk in pregnant women. The early detection of risk factors makes it possible to inform the mother of the potential adverse effects on the foetus, redirect the situation, or acti-

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