

Investigating pregnant patients' oral health knowledge, perspectives, and practices during prenatal care in Southern Illinois.

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Abstract:

Introduction: An expected mother can experience a wide range of physiological changes during pregnancy. These changes happen in response to many factors: increased total blood volume, weight gain, increased fetus size, and hormonal changes. Hormonal changes can cause fluctuations anywhere in the body, even the oral cavity, leading to gingivitis, an inflammation of the gums. Pregnant women can be more prone to gum disease. It is vital that women who are expecting practice good oral hygiene habits for both themselves and the baby.

Methods: This cross-sectional study (IRB #2079) included a paper survey of pregnant patients at the Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation (SIHF) obstetrician clinic located at Alton Memorial in Alton, Illinois, between September 2023 and March 2024. The study was divided into demographic data, and the second part centers on oral health knowledge, perspectives, and practices. The primary outcome focuses on the overall oral health knowledge of the selected population during pregnancy.

Results: The survey results indicated that 91% of participants believe issues with tooth decay and bleeding gums can worsen during pregnancy. Also, 82% agreed gum problems can affect the pregnancy and create issues during birth. However, a surprising 73% of respondents indicated during the baby's development calcium will be extracted from the mother's teeth. Only 27% of the participants noted they receive regular dental care every six months; the majority, 45%, reported they received it within the past five years. Overall, 81% strongly agreed/agreed that hygiene measures are essential to minimize oral complications during pregnancy.

Conclusion: After the survey results were reported, oral hygiene education was a definite need among patients and working with a collaborative interprofessional team to reduce adverse outcomes during pregnancy. Health literacy education is vital for improving the health of the mother and the baby, regardless of age, number of pregnancies, or education level. The Southern Illinois Healthcare Foundation (SIHF) will use these results to improve prenatal care for future patients.