Complementary and alternative medicine use in pregnancy in Mashhad, Iran, 2007-8

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study was done to assess the use of traditional/complementary and alternative medicine (TM/CAM) during pregnancy and the reasons behind it from the mother’s perspective.

Materials and Methods: In a cross-sectional study, 919 pregnant mothers attending at prenatal care units of governmental health centers recruited through a multistage sampling and completed a self-report questionnaire about the use of TM/CAM during pregnancy.

Findings: TM/CAM was used by 83.7% of women during pregnancy. Diet/nutrition change was applied by 42.3%, herbal preparations by 49.2%, vitamin and mineral by 30.1%, body based practices by 24.7% and spiritual methods by 22.9% of mothers. Most frequently used herbal products were frankincense in 28.6% and date fruit in 26.4% of mothers. The most common indication of diet/nutrition changes and herbal products used related to mothers was gastro-intestinal disorders. Most of the TM/CAM methods used (64.32%) were happening or beginning from the first trimester of pregnancy.

Conclusions: The use of TM/CAM methods in pregnancy is very common, mainly included the methods suggested by traditional Islamic Iranian medicine. Thus, clinicians should be informed to address CAM methods at each obstetric visit. Safety and efficacy of CAM must be explored and taught in every health education program. Future studies should focus on the safety and efficacy of TM/CAM in pregnancy and clinicians should be educated to address these methods at prenatal visits.

Key words: Complementary and alternative medicine, traditional medicine, obstetrics, pregnancy, women, diet and nutrition, herbal preparations, spiritual therapy

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies show that complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is frequently used in the field of obstetrics, worldwide.[1] The medical view holds pregnancy and childbirth as inherently risky, therefore technological interventions are required in order to decrease the risks.[2] Doubts about the well-being of the fetus were found to be especially prominent in women in this period.[3] As complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) is believed safe, pregnant women may consider it to be the best choice for problems during pregnancy as these methods also seem very true to life from the lay standpoint.[4] An overview on earlier studies on CAM during pregnancy showed that there are great variations regarding the use of different CAM methods in different countries.[5] In spite of no known national CAM prevalence studies of pregnant women in the U.S., existing reports of CAM usage in pregnancy range from 7.1% to 73%.[6-10] CAM therapies are also widely used by the U.S. clinical nurse midwives.[11] There are only a few reports that study the safety of CAM methods in pregnancy. A recent study shows that the use of CAM is associated with a 30% lower ongoing pregnancy/live birth rate through 12

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