

Use of herbal medicines by pregnant women in Shahr-e-Kord

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Abstract

Introduction: Researchers have shown that herbal medicines are used by a large portion of pregnant women. Herbs are generally perceived as safe, harmless and free from side-effect but there have been reports on side-effects in pregnant mothers and their fetuses as well as on drug interactions. This study was undertaken to determine the prevalence of the use of herbal medicines among pregnant women referring to health care centers in Shahr-e-Kord.

Materials & Methods: In this descriptive and cross-sectional study, 447 pregnant women, referring to health care centers and Hajar Hospital in Shahr-e-Kord, were interviewed while employing a structured questionnaire. The cases were chosen by simple random sampling. For the data analysis, student t-test and χ^2 were used.

Results: In all, 51.9% of the pregnant women reported the use of herbal medicines during pregnancy. 91.7% of the women, had a positive attitude toward the use of herbal medicines during pregnancy, but 15% believed that the use of herbal medicines in pregnancy was unsafe. Among respondents, 55.9% had not reported the use of herbs to their physicians and the most common reasons for nondisclosure were the belief that herbal medicines were natural and safe (39.1%) and that doctors never asked about them (34.8%). The most commonly reported uses of herbs were for common cold (29.1%), abdominal pain (17.4%) and induction of labor (11.7%). *Anchusa officinalis* was the most commonly used herb among 55 other species of herbs. 74.2% of medicinal herb consumers cited family and relatives as their main source of information on the herbs. Factors associated with the use of herbal medicines in pregnancy were number of parities 1-3, monthly income more than 1,500,000 Rials and age 20-29, but none were statistically significant. There were significantly lower frequencies of herbal use in pregnancy among women with academic education ($p=.004$).

Conclusion: The widespread use of herbal medications and the positive attitude toward them during pregnancy, indicates an increased need to educate health-care providers on these issues to advise women not to expose themselves and their fetuses to the probable risks of herbal preparations.

Key Words: Pregnancy, Pregnant women, Herbal medicines, Side-effect, Self treatment, Traditional medicine.

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