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Knowledge and practices of oral hygiene among pregnant mothers attending antenatal clinics in the Nallur MOH area

Sinthujan N¹, Abesinghe AHMSPK¹, Nilany S¹, Mathuri T¹, Mathangi S¹, Coonghe PAD², Kavithambiga K³

¹Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

²Department of Community and Family Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna

³ADC St Johns' College, under RDHS, Jaffna

Background and Objective: Good oral hygiene is essential for overall health and is particularly important during pregnancy. Poor oral hygiene in pregnancy has been associated with adverse outcomes such as preterm birth and low birth weight. However, oral health remains a neglected area of antenatal care in Sri Lanka. This study aimed to assess the knowledge and practices of oral hygiene among pregnant mothers attending antenatal clinics in the Nallur MOH area.

Methods: A community-based descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among pregnant mothers attending all antenatal clinics under the Nallur MOH division from August to November 2024. Systematic sampling was used to select 246 participants. Data were collected using a pretested interviewer-administered questionnaire assessing sociodemographic details, oral hygiene knowledge, and practices. Knowledge was scored out of 32 items and categorized as good (>65%), average (50–65%), or poor (<50%). Data were analysed using SPSS software with descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to determine associations between variables.

Results: Among 246 respondents, the mean age was 28.5 ± 4.5 years. Most participants had completed GCE A/L (n=148, 48.8%), 192 participants were housewives (78%). Regarding period of amenorrhea, number of participants who were in their second trimester was 104 (42.3%), third trimester was 102 (41.5%), and first trimester was 40 (16.3%). Among the participants 139 (56.5%) had previous pregnancy. Majority of the participants, 65.9% (n=162) had good knowledge of oral hygiene, 30.5% (n=75) had average knowledge, and 3.6% (n=9) had poor knowledge. While only 34.6% had a dental examination within six months prior to pregnancy. A significant association was observed between higher knowledge and longer brushing duration ($p < 0.001$). Educational level was significantly associated with oral hygiene practices ($p = 0.047$).

Conclusion: Although most pregnant mothers demonstrated good knowledge of oral hygiene, gaps remain in translating knowledge into regular preventive dental practices. Limited dental visits and misconceptions about safety during pregnancy indicate importance of oral health education and integrate it into routine antenatal care programs.

Keywords: oral hygiene, pregnancy, maternal health, dental care, antenatal education