Oral health and pregnancy
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Abstract
The progressive physiological changes that occur during pregnancy due to hormonal changes are necessary to support and safeguard the developing fetus and also to prepare the mother for parturition. But these systemic changes can also affect the female’s oral health causing deleterious effects on the quality of life of a female during pregnancy. Dental diseases such as deep dental caries, dental erosion, and periodontal infections can exacerbate during pregnancy. Moreover change in diet, nausea and vomiting during pregnancy deteriorates oral health and increases the chances of dental erosion and dental caries. Furthermore during labor and delivery, dislodged tooth and prostheses can cause complications. (El Med J 2:3; 2014)

Keywords: Oral Health, Pregnancy, Women’s Health

Essay
Pregnancy is a very unique and precious experience in a woman’s life. The progressive physiological changes that occur during pregnancy due to hormonal changes are necessary to support and safeguard the developing fetus and also to prepare the mother for parturition [1]. However, these systemic changes can also affect the female’s oral health, causing deleterious effects on the quality of life of a female during pregnancy. Dental diseases such as deep dental caries, dental erosion and periodontal infections can exacerbate during pregnancy [2, 3]. Moreover, change in diet, nausea and vomiting during pregnancy deteriorates oral health and increases the chances of dental erosion and dental caries. Furthermore, during labor and delivery dislodged tooth and prostheses can cause complications [4, 5].

Dental problems not only cause severe pain and discomfort to the pregnant females, but can also be a risk factor for preterm delivery and low birth weight of the newborn [6]. We would like to highlight the significance of management of oral health of a female during pregnancy. Primary care for oral health during pregnancy would prevent a female from undergoing through its deleterious complications [6]. Literature suggests that periodontal diseases may be associated with prenatal mortality. The rate of prenatal mortality in Pakistan is 10-fold greater as compared to the developed countries, which has exacerbated with the increase in periodontal diseases [7-9]. In Pakistan not much emphasis is laid on oral health during pregnancy and therefore it is left untreated. A study from Pakistan reported that 76% of females suffering from periodontal disease had stillbirth, and chances of neonatal and perinatal death were also higher among such females with a relative risk of approximately 1.3 [10].

Thus, healthcare professionals should recognize the importance of good oral health and make certain recommendations for its prevention during pregnancy. Although certain standardized guidelines have been established for health care professionals for providing standardized prenatal care, but unfortunately no such guidelines are formulated with regards to prenatal maternal dental care. Studies from various parts of the world suggest that majority of the health professionals providing prenatal care rarely incorporate oral examination for pregnant woman as a part of standard prenatal care [11]. Hence we would like to recommend that the prenatal care provider and dentists should be closely linked to each other. Moreover awareness should be raised among the treating gynecologist regarding the significance of oral health during pregnancy. Furthermore, awareness should also be raised among the pregnant females regarding the importance of their oral health through public health messages. This can help in improving the utilization of dental services by females during pregnancy and thus will have profound effects not only on the health of the expectant mother, but also on the health of their newborns.

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