

Medication use in pregnancy: a cross-sectional, multinational web-based study

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Abstract

Objectives: Intercountry comparability between studies on medication use in pregnancy is difficult due to dissimilarities in study design and methodology. This study aimed to examine patterns and factors associated with medications use in pregnancy from a multinational perspective, with emphasis on type of medication utilised and indication for use.

Design: Cross-sectional, web-based study performed within the period from 1 October 2011 to 29 February 2012. Uniform collection of drug utilisation data was performed via an anonymous online questionnaire.

Setting: Multinational study in Europe (Western, Northern and Eastern), North and South America and Australia.

Participants: Pregnant women and new mothers with children less than 1 year of age. Primary and secondary outcome measures: Prevalence of and factors associated with medication use for acute/short-term illnesses, chronic/long-term disorders and over-the-counter (OTC) medication use.

Results: The study population included 9459 women, of which 81.2% reported use of at least one medication (prescribed or OTC) during pregnancy. Overall, OTC medication use occurred in 66.9% of the pregnancies, whereas 68.4% and 17% of women reported use of at least one medication for treatment of acute/short-term illnesses and chronic/long-term disorders, respectively. The extent of self-reported medicated illnesses and types of medication used by indication varied across regions, especially in relation to urinary tract infections, depression or OTC nasal sprays. Women with higher age or lower educational level, housewives or women with an unplanned pregnancy were those most often reporting use of medication for chronic/long-term disorders. Immigrant women in Western (adjusted OR (aOR): 0.55, 95% CI 0.34 to 0.87) and Northern Europe (aOR: 0.50, 95% CI 0.31 to 0.83) were less likely to report use of medication for chronic/long-term disorders during pregnancy than nonimmigrants.

Conclusions: In this study, the majority of women in Europe, North America, South America and Australia used at least one medication during pregnancy. There was a substantial inter-region variability in the types of medication used.

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