



Abuse of pregnant women in the healthcare system

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Objective

The purpose of this study was to determine the incidence of abuse in the healthcare system during pregnancy and its impact on pregnancy outcomes.

Methods

Questionnaire (NorAQ questionnaire) identifying four kinds of abuse, emotional, physical, sexual and abuse in the healthcare system, was anonymously offered to all women during the first two days postpartum, over a three month period.

Results

The study group consisted of 1018 women, 5.8% of which reported experiencing abuse in healthcare system during pregnancy. Affected women presented with a higher incidence of preterm delivery (OR 2.4; 95% CI 1.2 - 4.8) and higher cesarean section rate (OR 2.0, 95% CI 1.1 - 3.6). Sexual abuse and abuse in healthcare system during childhood were associated with abuse in healthcare system during pregnancy (OR 4.4; CI 95% 1.2 - 16.2, and OR 6.9; CI 95% 1.3 - 35.4, respectively).

Conclusion

Our study indicates that, around 6% of pregnant women experience abuse, that is inflicted by perinatal care providers. Eventually, these pregnancies end more often preterm and by cesarean section. This possibly causal relationship should be further explored.

Incidence of preterm births, cesarean sections and small for gestational age (SGA) neonates by severity of healthcare system abuse during pregnancy. Numbers refer to available data on each variable (%) and OR (95% CI).

	Preterm birth	Cesarean section	SGA
No abuse	95/841 (11.3)	171/882 (19.4)	25/781 (3.2)
Mild abuse	12/51 (23.5) 2.4 (1.2 – 4.8)	17/53 (32.1) 2.0 (1.1 – 3.6)	4/48 (8.3) 2.7 (0.9 – 8.2)
Moderate abuse	9/36 (25) 2.6 (1.1 - 5.6)	13/37 (35.1) 2.2 (1.1 – 4.4)	3/34 (8.8) 2.9 (0.8 – 10.0)
Severe abuse	0	2/5 (40) 2.7 (0.4 – 16.1)	0