ATTITUDES, KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF HERBAL PRODUCTS AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN: A PILOT SURVEY IN TUSCANY

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Objective. To explore pregnant women’s attitudes, knowledge and beliefs on Alternative Drugs [ADs] (manufactured from herbs or with a natural origin) and their information sources concerning these products.

Methods. A pilot survey was conducted among 172 pregnant women in their third trimester of pregnancy, consecutively recruited in three obstetrical settings. Subjects were interviewed with a semi-structured questionnaire; 15 women were randomly chosen to compute a test-to-retest analysis.

Results. Response rate was 87.20%. Test-to-retest showed a ‘very good’ agreement (K=0.9; p<0.001) between the two interview waves. Mean age was 32.4±0.38 years old and most women were nulliparae (62.70%). 72% of participants had a University degree. The majority of subjects (68%) declared a lifetime use of one or more ADs. During current pregnancy, 48% of subjects reported taking at least one AD. Health or sociodemographic characteristics did not differ between “users” or “non-users” of ADs, during pregnancy or not. Women’s habits to use ADs in their life entailed a higher risk to take ADs also during pregnancy; in addition 59.1% of the subjects were not able to correctly identify the type of AD they were using. The majority of women resorted to gynaecologists (32.61%) as primary information source for ADs during pregnancy, while they mainly referred to herbalists (50.43%) when not pregnant. 52% of the sample considered ADs to be safer than conventional medicines.

Conclusions. In the light of scanty data about ADs’ safety aspects, these preliminary findings confirmed the need to explore pregnant women concerns on AD utilisation. A consuetudinary utilisation of ADs seems to be a strong predictor for AD use also during pregnancy.