



The First Scientific Conference on Health and Medical Research in the UAE-5-6 December 2022

Health Literacy levels and associated factors among Emirati Pregnant Women: The Mutaba'ah Study

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Background: Health literacy is defined as the degree to which individuals can obtain, process, understand, and communicate health-related information required to make informed health decisions. Health literacy among pregnant women may significantly impact maternal and child health, as established through international research. In the United Arab Emirates, no previous studies have investigated the health literacy levels of pregnant women.

Method: This study reports the results from baseline cross-sectional data obtained from pregnant women participating in the Mutaba'ah Study. Mutaba'ah is the largest mother and child health prospective cohort study in the UAE, which included the recruitment of around 12,800 expectant mothers between May 2017 and September 2022 from major hospitals in Al Ain city. For the current analysis, data from self-administered questionnaires during the antenatal visits was used, which collected sociodemographic and pregnancy-related information, including health literacy assessment, using the Brief health literacy questionnaire. Regression models were performed to investigate the associations of sociodemographic and pregnancy related-variables with health literacy.

Results: 2694 responses to the Brief health literacy tool were analyzed. Most respondents reported adequate health literacy levels (71.6%), followed by 22.8% with marginal and 5.6% with limited literacy levels. Participants were more likely to have higher literacy levels if they were more educated [adjusted odds ratio (aOR): 1.80, 95% Confidence Interval (CI): 1.45-2.24], employed [aOR: 1.45, 95% CI (1.14-1.84)], had enough people to count on for social support [aOR: 1.67, 95% CI: 1.19-2.34] and were previously vaccinated [aOR: 1.18, 95% CI: 1.0-1.39]. Participants that expressed worry about birth were less like to have high literacy levels [aOR: 0.75, 95% CI: 0.60-0.93].

Conclusion: Health literacy among Emirati pregnant women is adequate; however, policies should be directed to maintain and improve prenatal health literacy levels for better maternal and child health outcomes.

Key words: Health literacy, Mutaba'ah , antenatal, pregnant women, health outcomes, Emirati, UAE United Arab Emirates.

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