

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 decisions¹. 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 the baseline cross-sectional data from pregnant women participating in the Mutaba'ah study².

Data was collected via self-administered questionnaires during the antenatal visits. Health literacy assessment was done using the Brief health literacy questionnaire (score range shown in Table 1). Regression modelling was performed to investigate factors associated with health literacy among the participants.

Table 1: Score range for each category of health literacy level

Brief	Score	Skill and Abilities
Limited	4-12	Not able to read most low literacy health materials; will need repeated oral instructions; materials should be composed of illustrations or video tapes. Will need low literacy materials; may not be able to read a prescription label.
Marginal	13-16	May need assistance; may struggle with patient education materials
Adequate	17-20	Will be able to read and comprehend most patient education materials.

Results

2,694 pregnant women were included with a mean (\pm SD) age of 30.8 \pm 6.0 years, and with mean gravidity and parity 3.7 \pm 2.2 and 3.1 \pm 1.8 respectively. The majority had had high school education (55.3%), were unemployed (69.1%), were not having the first child (73.2%), were having planned pregnancy (58.2%), perceived adequate social support (91.9%), had not been previously vaccinated (56.9%) and expressed worry about birth (64.2%)

Most participants had adequate literacy levels as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Brief Health literacy score of 2694 pregnant women

Categories based on BRIEF score	N (%)
Limited	152 (5.6%)
Marginal	614 (28.4%)
Adequate	1928 (71.6%)

Results (contd.)

Participants were more likely to have higher literacy levels if they were more educated, employed, had enough people to count on for social support, or reported receiving vaccination within the past two years.

Pregnant women who expressed more worry about birth were less likely to have adequate health literacy levels.

Table 3: Association of sociodemographic and healthcare

Characteristic	Crude Odds Ratio	Adjusted Odds Ratios
Education		
High	1.77 (1.49-2.11)*	1.80 (1.45-2.24)*
Low	Ref	Ref
Employment		
Employed	1.33 (1.10-1.62)*	1.45 (1.14-1.84)*
Unemployed	Ref	Ref
Social support		
Yes	1.65 (1.23-2.22)*	1.67 (1.19-2.34)*
No	Ref	Ref
Birth Worry		
Yes	0.71 (0.59-0.85)*	0.75 (0.60-0.93)*
No	Ref	Ref
Vaccination		
Yes	1.09 (0.96-1.24)	1.18 (1.0-1.39)*
No	Ref	Ref

* P-values <0.05

Conclusions

- ❑ High adequate health literacy rates were found among pregnant women in the UAE
- ❑ Sociodemographic and health related factors play key role in health literacy
- ❑ Policies should be directed to maintain and improve prenatal health literacy levels for better maternal and child health outcomes.

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