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DEPARTMENT OF NURSING AND MIDWIFERY SCIENCES

Prevalence of use of herbal medicine during pregnancy, labour and post-natal period
among women at Mpilo Maternity Unit, Bulawayo

A research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Master of
Science (MSc) Degree in Midwifery Education

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FEBRUARY 2017

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Abstract

Background: The study of use of herbal medicine related to maternal and child health has become one of health research priority in many African countries. Current studies show a need to study more comprehensively the prevalence of use, including in urban contexts where people have relatively higher access to public healthcare. Traditional/ herbal medicine is an underestimated part of healthcare. **Methodology:** The study collected cross-sectional data on use of herbal medicine among 267 women at the post natal ward at Mpilo Central Hospital during the month of December, 2016. Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected through an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Data was entered and analyzed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics, Chi square tests and Fishers' Exact tests were used to determine relationships among variables. **Results:** The overall prevalence of herbal use was 24.3% among pregnant women. The use of herbal medicine was associated with lower level of education ($p < 0.001$). A proportion of users took herbal medicine only to boost or maintain health. Beliefs about safety and efficacy were consistent with pattern of use or non-use, although both users and non-users were more ambiguous about the safety and contraindication of Western medicine during pregnancy as compared to herbal medicine. **Conclusion:** Rational use of both herbal and Western medicine, by discussing contraindications and the potential of drug-herb interactions with patients should be emphasized by health care workers. More studies are needed in the use of herbal medicine across pregnancy labour and postpartum period and in health outcomes associated with use. There is need to develop an integrative approach to health care that allows those who use both services, healthcare services and traditional medicine, to do so in a safe, respectful and effective manner. Demystifying traditional medicine use will assist clients to make informed decisions regarding its use, this will prevent drug interactions as some of the remedies have not been adequately researched for efficacy.

Keywords: herbal medicine, pregnancy, maternal health, child health.