

ABSTRACT

The well-known associations between oral health and pregnancy demand the integration of oral health component into the general health service provision. The pregnant mothers programme launched by the Ministry of Health in the year 2009 provides necessary policy support towards the cause. To reap the maximum benefit of the programme it is essential to look at the factors that affect the utilization of oral health services during pregnancy. This will facilitate to overcome the challenges faced by the service providers as well as the beneficiaries in the future.

A descriptive cross sectional study was carried out to describe the utilization patterns of oral health care services by mothers attending antenatal clinics, by recruiting 422 mothers in their third trimester from the Dehiwala Medical Officer of Health area. Probability Proportional to Size sampling technique was used to determine the number of mothers to be selected from each of the twelve antenatal clinics in the area and a systematic sampling technique was used to enrol mothers at each antenatal clinic. The term 'utilization' was used in this study to indicate getting at least an oral screening done by a dental surgeon during the current pregnancy. A pretested interviewer administered questionnaire and a pretested record sheet was used to collect data.

Results showed 28% of antenatal mothers to have utilized the oral health services during the current pregnancy. Antenatal clinic the mothers have attended, referral status to an oral health care facility, receiving advice on oral health during pregnancy, ethnicity, religion, level of education and the number of children the mothers already have were significantly associated with utilization status. Age of the mother, family unit, employment status, occupational status and monthly family income were not significantly associated with the utilization status of oral health services during pregnancy.

Out of the 72% of mothers in the study sample who have not utilized the services 41.1% perceived to be having an oral health problem. Considering it 'not urgent to attend to' was the main reason stated by most of the non-users. Majority of the users have visited a private dental clinic (61.9%). Out of those who utilised the services 56.8% have obtained dental services in their second trimester and received oral hygiene instructions/ brushing instructions (51.7%). Approximately half of the mothers who have utilized oral health services thought that there is a need for further treatment.

Attaching a dental surgeon to the MOH office and conducting health education sessions on oral health by a visiting dental surgeon to the antenatal clinics were the suggestions put forward by the mothers to improve the utilization of services that are directed at them.

The results of the present study highlight the need of motivating the public health staff and advocating dental surgeons on the importance of utilization of oral health care services during pregnancy.

Key words: Oral health, Pregnancy, Utilization

