INTRODUCTION

Oral health literacy (OHL) refers to an individual’s capacity to understand and act upon oral health information effectively. OHL is vital for expectant mothers and their children’s well-beings. Maternal OHL directly influences the oral health behaviors and dental care decisions. This research aims to explore the varying levels of maternal OHL and its impact on oral health behaviors, understanding these factors is vital in optimizing oral health outcomes for both mothers and children.

MATERIALS & METHODS

- One-on-one interview among low-risk pregnant individuals (still ongoing).
- Questions included demographics, dental healthcare, maternal oral health knowledge and beliefs, dental insurance, perceived oral health, previous dental visits, and their interactions with past healthcare providers.
- Health Literacy in Dentistry (HeLD) is a questionnaire composed of questions surrounding oral health literacy based off the participants abilities or challenges. Responses were recorded on a Likert-scale from 'Without any difficulty' = (5) to 'Unable to do' = (0), 65 is the highest attainable score.
- Study location: East Carolina University’s Women’s Physician Clinic and ECU Health Brody outpatients center.
- All participants were given an oral health hygiene kit for the completion of the survey.

RESULTS

Table 1.1: Patient Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Participants:</th>
<th>23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average Age [Years]:</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Ethnicity:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15 (65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 year or 4-year degree</td>
<td>14 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>6 (26%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some level of High School</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig 1.1: Age distribution

26% Ages 20-25
22% Ages 26-30
52% Ages 30+

Fig 1.2: Household Income Distribution

48% $25,000-$45,000
26% $56,000-$75,000
13% None/Not sure
39% Medicaid
5% Private
13% N/A
13% $25,000-$45,000
13% $45,000-$65,000

Fig 1.3: Dental Insurance Providers

26% Medicaid
35% Private
12% None/Not sure

Fig 1.4: Last Visit to Dentist

28% <6 mo
26% 6-12 months
13% 1-2 years
13% 2-5 years

Goal of the study:
1. Evaluate knowledge and beliefs regarding oral health of pregnant women
2. Evaluate oral health literacy of pregnant women


DISCUSSION

The study’s results show a promising level of oral health literacy and strong inclination toward good oral health behaviors for their children.

A substantial proportion of the participants demonstrated a good understanding of oral health and were proactive about their child’s oral health care.

Frequent dental visits emerged as a critical factor influencing oral health knowledge and behaviors. Participants without recent dental visits were more likely to have misconceptions and poorer oral health, highlighting the role of regular dental check-ups in reinforcing correct information and practices.

Implications and future studies:
Addressing knowledge gaps and access to barriers can empower expectant mothers to make informed decisions for better oral health outcomes. These findings can inform targeted interventions to improve maternal and child oral health care and reduce oral health disparities.

REFERENCES


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