

Drug prescription misuse among pregnant women attending antenatal care at a health facility in Ghana: A cross-sectional study

Abstract

Background: Misuse of prescription drugs by pregnant women has become a major public health challenge in developing and developed countries due to its detrimental effects on the health of the mother and unborn child. The purpose of this study was to identify prescription drug misuse among pregnant women seeking antenatal care at Presbyterian Hospital, Dormaa Ahenkro in the Dormaa Central municipality of Ghana.

Methods: This study used a healthcare facility-based cross-sectional descriptive design to recruit 235 pregnant women using a simple random sampling technique and through the administration of a structured questionnaire face-to-face with respondents to solicit data. The data were analyzed with SPSS version 26 and the results were presented descriptively and inferentially using tables and graphs and a P-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results: The study found that the prevalence of prescription drug misuse among pregnant women in the municipality was 32.8% and the most commonly misused drugs were acetaminophen (52.8%), antimalarial (21.4%) and antibiotics (9.4%). Factors such as trimester of pregnancy ($X^2=12.9$, $P=0.002$), and history of urinary tract infection ($X^2=6.11$, $P=0.013$) were associated with drug prescription abuse. In addition, employment status ($X^2= 13.1$, $P = 0.0001$) produced a strong association with prescription drug misuse.

Conclusion: The study concluded that pregnant women in the municipality misused prescribed drugs and this has serious health implications of the mother and the unborn child.

Key words: Pregnancy, Prescription, Misuse, Antenatal

Background

Drug prescription misuse among pregnant women has become a major public health concern for global health communities (1). Drug prescription misuse is defined as the drug used in larger quantities, higher frequency, longer durations, or for a different purpose than that directed by a clinician or a healthcare provider (2). Alternatively, it is the use of prescribed drugs in doses that do not meet pregnant women's clinical needs or for an extended period of experience or feelings derived from the medication(3). Some of the common factors that influence pregnant women to misuse prescribed drugs include self-efficiency and internal stressors, social factors such as identity and structural factors such as, insufficient knowledge and inability to understand risk because of the way it is communicated (4). In addition, the availability of prescription medication is attributed to a greater risk of drug prescription misuse among pregnant women (3).

It has been established in the literature that, globally, one in every five pregnant women misuse prescribed medications (1) For example in Iran, it is found that about 15% of pregnant women were reported misusing prescribed drugs by healthcare professionals (5). The available body of knowledge indicated that drug prescription misuse was on the rise among pregnant women in Africa (4). It is also found that the illicit use of drugs by pregnant women is far advancing in developed nations and sooner or later, pregnant women in low and middle-income countries would be affected (6). This will increase neonates' exposure to a 90% risk of developing neonatal abstinence syndrome in addition to the adverse effects on the mother and the infants which significantly contributes to the high prevalence of antimicrobial resistance (7).

In the southern part of Ghana, a cross-sectional study indicated that self-medication was high among pregnant women thus 68% of the participants were found already engaged in self-medication (8). In addition the findings of a cross-sectional study conducted in Ghana have established that the prevalence of self-medication practice was 74.1% (9). Moreover, about 65% of pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic misused prescribed antibiotics (10). Therefore, to protect and safeguard the health and well-being of pregnant women and their unborn babies, the rate at which pregnant women misuse prescribed drugs should be determined so that, education and awareness programs can be initiated to reduce the risk of exposure to drug misuse. As such understanding, the reasons why pregnant women misuse prescribed drugs is pertinent to designing strategies and interventions to improve maternal, neonatal and child health (4).

Though Ghana has recorded significant variations of drug prescription misuse among pregnant women, there is a paucity of information regarding pregnant women's misuse of prescribed drugs in the Presbyterian Hospital. Therefore this study sought to determine drug prescription misuse among pregnant women attending antenatal care at Presbyterian Hospital, Dormaa Ahenkro, Ghana.

Methods

Study design

The study was quantitative and employed a health facility-based descriptive cross-sectional design to determine prescribed drug misuse among pregnant women attending antenatal care at the Presbyterian Hospital.

Study setting

The study was conducted at the Presbyterian hospital in the Dormaa Central Municipality in the Bono Region of Ghana. The eligible participants were recruited from the antenatal clinic of the hospital during antenatal visits. These participants were pregnant women who had been prescribed medication since conception by a clinician and also attended the antenatal clinic at the hospital. Pregnant women who live within the municipality and voluntarily consent to partake in the study were recruited in the study. However, pregnant women on medication who were severely sick and term for delivery were excluded from the study.

Sampling and Data Collection procedures

The study recruited 235 pregnant women who voluntarily consented to partake in the study. A simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting eligible respondents for the study with the help of a structured questionnaire developed for the study. The questionnaire was categorised into sections. Section A. provided information on respondents' sociodemographic factors; Section B. provided information on prescription drug misuse among respondents and section C. on the factors associated with prescription drug misuse among respondents. To ensure transparency and reduction in selection bias, Respondents were made to pick from a bowl of papers written "YES" and "NO". The respondents who pick "YES" were selected and included in the study while those who pick "NO" were appreciated and excluded from the study. The questionnaire was administered face to face with respondents until the required sample size was obtained for the study.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed with the help of SPSS version 26. The categorical variables were coded and entered into SPSS. Descriptive statistics were conducted on categorical variables and presented in frequencies and percentages. Mean and standard deviation was calculated for continuous variables from the data collected. Pearson Chi-square test was used to measure the association between the dependent and the independent variables and a PV less than 0.05 indicated a statistically significant association.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was sought from the Ethics Review Committee Board of the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG) with protocol approval numb (**CHAG-IRB05042022**). Informed consent was obtained from the respondents. The respondents were informed that participation in the study was strictly voluntary. That, if a respondent decided not to participate, it would not in any way affect their access to services. Also, they were informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point after their initial acceptance to participate in the study. If a respondent withdrew from the study, any information provided was discarded.

Results

Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents

The study recruited 235 respondents and there was a 100% response rate. The mean age of respondent were 28 ± 5 (23-33) years. About 85 (37.0%) of them were between the ages 26-30

years, 73 (31.1%) fell between the ages 31-36 years, 67 (29.4%) were 18-25 years and 8 (3.4%) were between the ages 37-42 years. Most 131 (55.7%) of the respondents were married, 63 (26.8%) were cohabiting, whilst 41 (17.4%) of them were single. The majority of 165 (70.2%) of the respondents were Akans whilst 70 (29.8%) were non-Akans. Most 162 (68.9%) of them were Christians, 72 (30.6%) were Moslems and 1 (0.4%) was Traditionalist. About 128 (54.5%) of them were employed whilst 107 (45.5%) were unemployed. Concerning their residency, most 148 (63.0%) resided in rural areas whilst about 87 (37.0%) lived in peri-urban areas. About 97 (41.3%) of respondents had tertiary education, 83 (35.7%) had secondary education, and 54 (23.0%) had basic education. With regards to the number of children of respondents, about 71 (30.2%) of them had no child, 71 (30.2%) had one child, 63 (26.8%) had two children and 30 (12.8%) had three children (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Socio-demographic characters of respondents

| Variable | Category | Frequency(n)=235 | Percentage (%) |
|---|---------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Mean age of respondents = 28±5 years | | | |
| Age (years) | 18-25 | 67 | 29.4 |
| | 26-30 | 87 | 37.0 |
| | 31-36 | 73 | 31.2 |
| | 37-42 | 8 | 3.4 |
| Marital Status | Married | 131 | 55.7 |
| | Single | 41 | 17.5 |
| | Co-habiting | 63 | 26.8 |
| Ethnicity | Akan | 165 | 70.2 |
| | Non-Akan | 70 | 29.8 |
| Religion | Christian | 162 | 68.9 |
| | Moslem | 72 | 30.7 |
| | Traditional | 1 | 0.4 |
| Employment Status | Employed | 128 | 54.5 |
| | Unemployed | 107 | 45.5 |
| Residency | Rural | 87 | 37.0 |
| | Peri-Urban | 148 | 63.0 |
| Education | Basic education | 54 | 23.0 |
| | Secondary education | 84 | 35.7 |
| | Tertiary education | 97 | 41.3 |
| Number of children | No child | 71 | 30.2 |
| | One child | 71 | 30.2 |
| | Two children | 63 | 26.8 |
| | three or more | 30 | 12.8 |

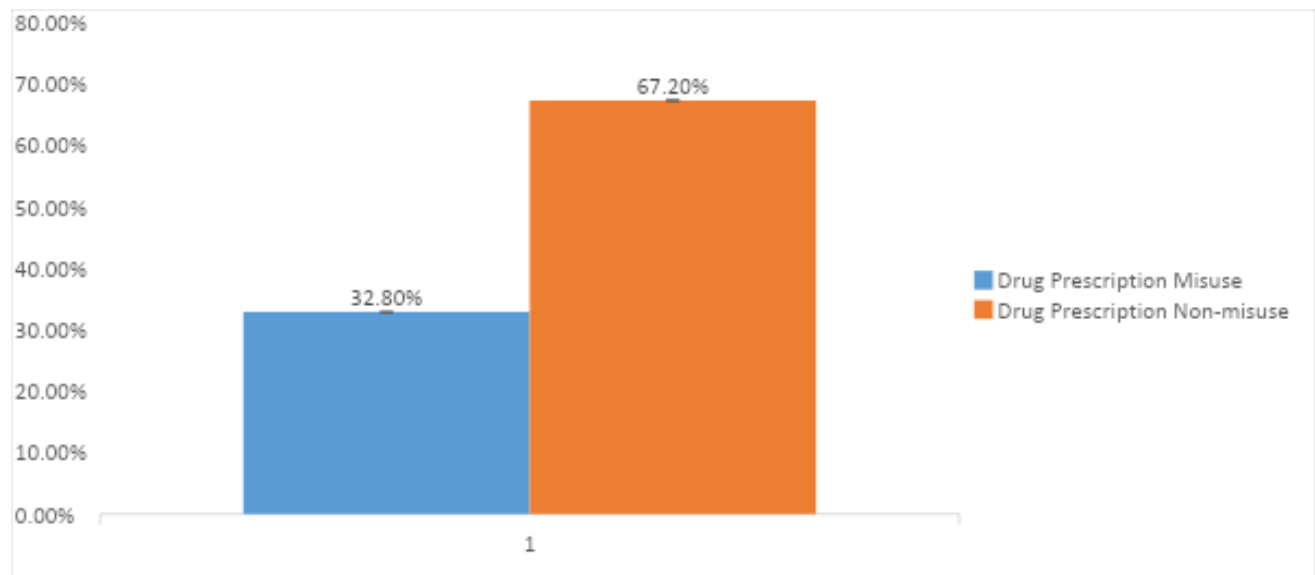


Figure 1.1: Prescription drug misuse

Figure 1.1 shows the prevalence of drug prescription misuse among the respondents. Most 158(67.2) of them did not misuse prescribed drugs whilst about 77(32.8%) of the respondents misused prescribed drugs during pregnancy.

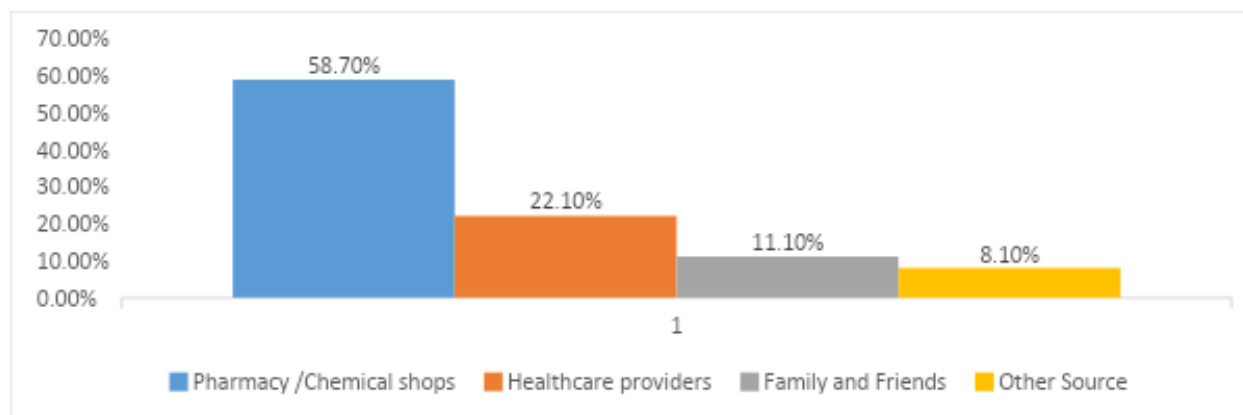


Figure 1.2 Sources of prescribed drugs misuse

Majority of the respondents (58.70%) who misused prescribed drugs sourced them from pharmacies or chemical shops, 22.10% from healthcare providers, 11.10% from family or friends and 8.10% from other sources (Fig.1.2).

Table 1.2: Distribution of obstetric factors of respondents

| Variable | Category | Frequency=235 | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Trimester of Pregnancy | First | 25 | 10.6 |
| | Second | 112 | 47.7 |
| | Third | 98 | 41.7 |
| Gravidity | Palligravid | 74 | 31.5 |
| | Multigravida | 161 | 68.5 |
| Parity (number of births) | 1-2 births | 161 | 68.5 |
| | 3-4birth | 72 | 30.6 |
| | >=5birth | 2 | 0.9 |
| Medical Insurance | Insured | 223 | 94.9 |
| | Non-Insured | 12 | 5.1 |
| Closeness to a health facility | Near (<5km) | 100 | 42.6 |
| | Distant (>5km) | 135 | 57.4 |
| ANC visitations | 1-2 times | 54 | 23.0 |
| | 3-4 times | 146 | 62.1 |
| | 5-6 times | 22 | 9.4 |
| | 7-10 times | 13 | 5.5 |
| History of UTI | | | |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|------|
| | Yes | 20 | 8.5 |
| | No | 215 | 91.5 |
| History of miscarriage | | | |
| | Yes | 43 | 18.3 |
| | No | 192 | 81.7 |

About 112 (47.7%) of respondents were in their second trimester of pregnancy, 98 (41.7%) third trimester and 25 (10.6%) first trimester. Most 161 (68.5%) of them had multiple pregnancies whilst 74 (30.6%) had one pregnancy. On the number of children of respondents, about 161 (68.5%) had one or two children, 72 (30.6%) had three or four children whilst 2 (0.9%) had five or more children. The majority 223 (94.9%) had medical insurance whilst 12 (5.1%) had no medical insurance. With regards to respondents' proximity to a health facility, about 135 (57.4%) were far (greater than five kilometres) from a health facility whilst 100 (42.6%) were near (travel distance of fewer than five kilometres to a health facility). Concerning ANC visitation, most 146 (62.1%) of them had visited the hospital three or four times, 54 (23.0%) had one or two visitations, 22 (9.4%) had five or six visitations and 13 (5.5%) had more than seven visitations. The majority 215 (91.5%) of them had no history of urinary tract infection whilst 20 (8.5%) had a history of urinary tract infection. In addition, 192 (81.7%) of the respondents had no history of miscarriage whilst 43 (18.3%) had a previous history of miscarriage (Table 1.2).

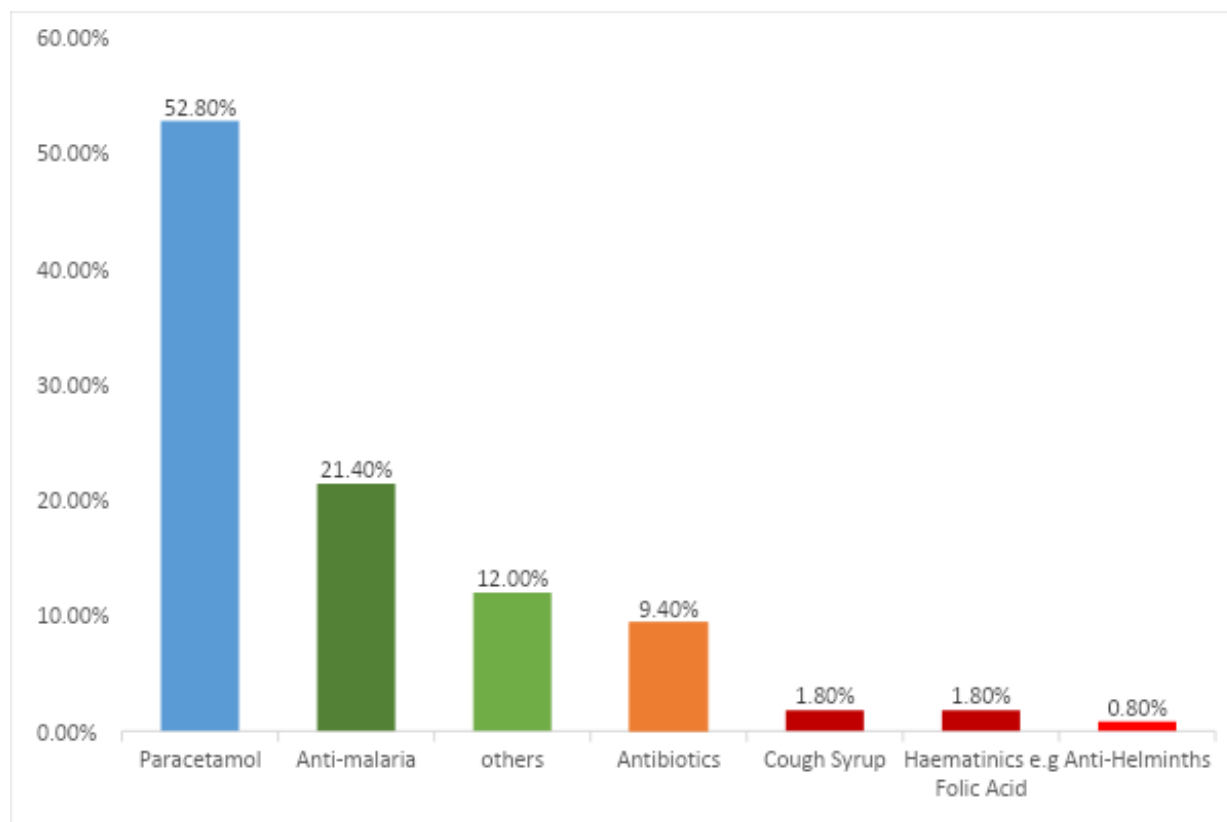


Figure 1.3: Common prescribed drugs misused

Most (52.8%) of them misused paracetamol, 21.40% anti-malarial drugs, and 12.0% misused other drugs, 9.40% anti-biotics. In addition, about (1.80%) misused cough syrup and haematinics whilst 0.80% also misused anti-helminths during the period of pregnancy.

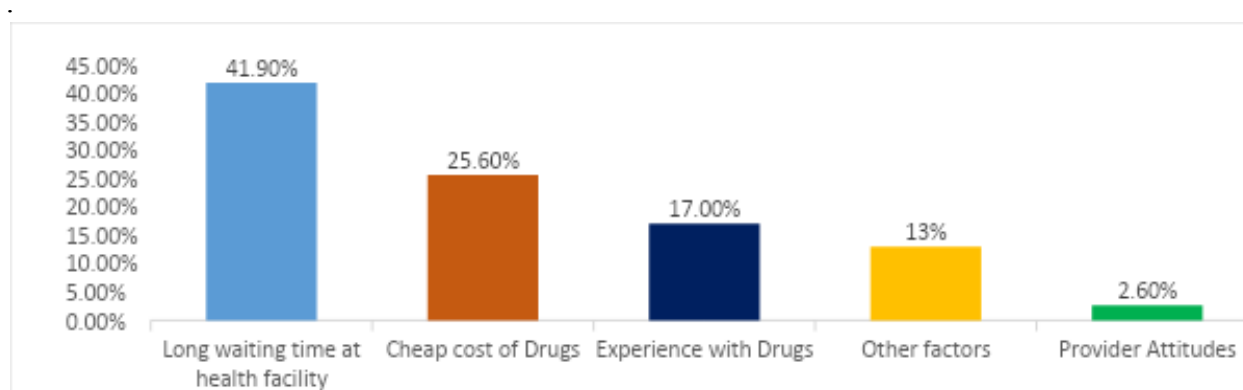


Figure 1.4 Motivation for prescribed drugs misuse

About 41.9% of respondents misused prescribed drugs due to long waiting times at health facilities, about (25.6%) indicated a cheap cost of drugs, and 17.0% had previous experience with drugs. In addition, about (13.0%) of them indicated other factors motivate them to misuse drugs whilst 2.60% indicated poor attitudes toward service providers motivate them to misuse prescribed drugs.

Table 1.3: Association between socio-demographic factors and drug prescription misuse

| Variable | Drug Prescription | | X ² (P-Value) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| | Drug misuse n(%) | Drug Non-misuse n(%) | |
| Age (years) | | | 2.213(0.53) |
| 18-25 | 19(24.0) | 52(32.7) | |
| 26-30 | 28(36.0) | 56(35.3) | |
| 31-36 | 27(36.0) | 45(28.8) | |
| 37-42 | 3(4.0) | 5(3.5) | |
| Marital Status | | | 1.31(0.52) |
| Married | 47(35.9) | 84(64.1) | |
| Single | 12(29.3) | 29(70.7) | |
| Co-habiting | 18(28.6) | 45(71.4) | |
| Ethnicity | | | 0.41(0.75) |
| Akan | 53(32.1) | 112(67.9) | |
| Non-Akan | 24(34.3) | 46(65.7) | |
| Religion | | | 2.95(0.35) |
| Christian | 52(32.1) | 110(67.9) | |
| Moslems | 24(33.3) | 48(66.7) | |
| Traditional | 1(100) | 0(0.0) | |
| Employment Status | | | 13.2(0.001)* |
| Employed | 55(43.0) | 73(57.0) | |
| Unemployed | 22(20.6) | 85(79.4) | |
| Residency | | | 2.50(0.14) |
| Rural | 34(39.1) | 53(60.9) | |
| Peri-Urban | 43(29.1) | 105(70.9) | |
| Education | | | 1.29(0.52) |
| Basic education | 21(38.9) | 33(61.1) | |
| Secondary education | 25(29.8) | 59(70.2) | |
| Tertiary Education | 31(32.0) | 66(68.0) | |
| Number of children | | | 0.37(0.95) |
| No child | 22(31.6) | 49(69.0) | |
| One child | 24(33.8) | 47(66.2) | |
| Two children | 22(34.9) | 41(65.1) | |
| Three or more children | 9(30.0) | 21(70.0) | |

Pearson chi-square set at a 95% confidence interval was used to determine the association between socio-demographic factors and drug prescription misuse among the respondents. The

strength of the association between respondents' status of employment and drug prescription misuse was 13.1 times and the relationship was statistically significant [$X^2 = 13.2$, $P=0.001$] (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4: Association between obstetric factors and drug prescription misuse

| Variable | Drug Prescription | | X^2 (P-Value) |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| | Drug misuse n(%) | Drug Non-misuse n(%) | |
| Trimester of pregnancy | | | 11.7(0.003)* |
| First trimester | 11(44.0) | 14(56.0) | |
| Second trimester | 46(41.1) | 66(58.9) | |
| Third trimester | 20(20.4) | 78(79.6) | |
| Gravidity | | | 0.28(0.6) |
| Palligravid | 26(35.1) | 48(64.9) | |
| Multigravida | 51(31.7) | 110(68.3) | |
| Parity | | | 0.99(0.61) |
| 1-2 births | 53(32.9) | 108(67.1) | |
| 3- 4 births | 24(33.3) | 48(66.7) | |
| 5 or more births | 0 (0.0) | 2 (100.0) | |
| Medical insurance | | | 0.46(0.50) |
| Insured | 72(32.3) | 151(67.7) | |
| Non-insured | 5(41.7) | 7(58.3) | |
| Closeness to facility | | | 0.004(0.95) |
| Near | 33(33.0) | 67(67.0) | |
| Distant | 44(32.6) | 91(67.4) | |
| ANC visitations | | | 5.43 (0.14) |
| 1-2 times | 16(29.6) | 38(70.4) | |
| 3-4 times | 54(37.0) | 92(63.0) | |
| 5-6 Times | 6(27.3) | 16(72.7) | |
| >6 times | 1 (7.7) | 12(92.3) | |
| History of UTI | | | 7.36(0.007)* |
| Yes | 12(60.0) | 8(40.0) | |
| No | 65(30.2) | 150(69.8) | |
| History of Miscarriage | | | 0.56(0.45) |
| Yes | 12(27.9) | 31(72.1) | |
| No | 65(33.9) | 127 (66.1) | |

X^2 : Chi-square, *, statistically significant

Pearson chi-square set at a 95% confidence interval was used to determine the association between socio-demographic factors and drug prescription misuse among pregnant women. The strength of association between the trimester of pregnancy and drug prescription misuse was 11.7 times and the relationship was statistically significant [$X^2 = 11.7$, $P=0.003$]. In addition, the strength of association between respondents' history of urinary tract infection was 7.36 times and the relationship was statistically significant [$X^2 = 7.36$, $P=0.007$] (Table 1.4).

Discussion

This current study found that the prevalence of drug prescription misuse among pregnant women attending antenatal care at the hospital was 32.8%. This means that, a significant proportion of pregnant women who reported to the hospital to access healthcare misuse prescribed medications provided to them to manage a condition. A cross-sectional study conducted in the United State found that drug prescription misuse among pregnant women was 5.1% and this finding does not support the outcome of this study (11). Similarly, a study conducted to determine the appropriate use of drugs among pregnant women has demonstrated that, about 53% of pregnant women misused prescribed medication (12). This is higher than the outcome of this current study and the findings do not relate well. Moreover, a study by (13) in the United States revealed that drug prescription misuse among pregnant women was 19.8%. This is lower than the prevalence established for this recent study. In addition, it was reported in a cross-sectional survey conducted in the United State by (11) indicated that a significant number (27.0%) of pregnant women misused illicit drugs. In addition, opioid medication misuse among pregnant women was found to be 31.8% (14) and this is similar to the outcome of this study. Another cross-sectional study conducted in Iran found that about 15% of pregnant women misuse prescribed drugs for the management of pregnancy-related health conditions (5). Additionally, a health facility-based cross-sectional study conducted in Ethiopia found that, among pregnant women who attended an antenatal clinic in Ethiopia, about 16.1% misused prescribed medications (15). Comparatively, this outcome is lower than the outcome of this recent study. In Ghana, (9) indicated that the majority (74.1%) of pregnant women self-medicate after visiting the clinic. This is also not consistent with the outcome of the current study. Furthermore, in a related study, it was found that most (68.1%) of pregnant women accessing antenatal care misused prescribed drugs (8). What would have accounted for the differences in the findings of studies conducted in Ghana could be due to the differences in geographical locations of pregnant women attending healthcare services and also the conditions with which they report to the hospital. Moreover, the availability and accessibility of misused drugs could also account for the dissimilarities of these findings.

Appropriately using prescribed drugs affect the health of the mother and the child. Abused drugs can cross the maternal placenta and present adverse consequences for foetal development whilst in the womb of the mother(13). The misuse of prescribed drugs by pregnant women results in low birth weight for children and poor neuropsychological functioning of the unborn child (14,16,17). Similarly, excessive use of prescribed drugs, irrespective of the type and nature of the drug affects the major body organs of the child, which may cause or lead to multiple brain structure damage resulting in lifelong disabilities and social problems for the child and the mother(15,18). Moreover, the continued misuse of prescribed drugs for pregnant women can result in most stillbirths and prematurity(15). The complications associated with pregnant women misusing prescribed drugs are enormous such as low birth weight of the child and neuropsychological functioning of the child (14,16).

This current study found that among the common drugs mostly prescribed and mostly misused by pregnant women at the facility were analgesics such as paracetamol accounting for 52.8%, followed by anti-malaria and anti-biotics. A study conducted in the USA indicated that most pregnant women misuse stimulants(19). Another study conducted by (4) revealed that most medications misused by pregnant women included opiates and methamphetamine. Moreover, (20) reported that most women who become pregnant subscribe to the daily use of opioids. What could have accounted for the dissimilarities in these findings might be the differences in respondents' locations and ease of accessibility of the common drugs. In addition, the differences

in conditions upon which a clinician will prescribe medication may be a possible cause for the differences in these findings.

In Ghana, a descriptive cross-sectional survey has revealed that most pregnant women misuse prescribed drugs including analgesics (paracetamol), anti-biotics and anti-malarial (8). These findings agree well with the outcome of the recent study. Another descriptive-analytical cross-sectional survey indicated that the most frequently prescribed and misused drugs by pregnant women attending antenatal care in Northern Ghana were analgesics, anti-biotics and anti-malarial (9). This finding is also in line with the outcome of this current survey. What could have accounted for the similarities of these findings might be the ease of accessibility and availability of these common drugs in most licensed chemical shops in Ghana (21). This is because most pregnant women misuse prescribed drugs such as antibiotics to treat urinary tract infections(7).

Socio-demographic factors play a pertinent role in determining the rate at which pregnant women misuse prescribed drugs. This recent study established that the employment status of pregnant women had an association with their misuse of prescribed medications (22) and found that, the employment status of pregnant women had a relationship to their misuse of prescribed drugs. This finding is in line with the outcome of this current study. Moreover, (23) established that pregnant women who are employed are less likely to use misused prescribed drugs and this also supports the outcome of the recent survey. In addition,(16) Eisenberg indicated that the low incomes of pregnant women had an increased risk of misuse of prescribed drugs. Similarly, in Tanzania, a cross-sectional study unearthed that, the employment status of pregnant women had an association with drug prescription misuse (24) and this agrees well with the outcome of the current study. However, (18) found that socio-demographic factors of pregnant women had no association with drug prescription misuse and this does not support the findings of this current study.

This study found that factors such as the trimester of pregnancy are associated with pregnant women's increased risk of misuse of prescribed drugs. This means that, when a woman becomes pregnant, her probability of misusing prescribed drugs increases and this is ascribed to the multiple stress most pregnant women encounter that pushes them to cope with such stress by misusing prescribed drugs. For example, some pregnant women may resort to alcohol use, cannabis, and cocaine while some may also resort to misuse of prescribed drugs to manage such pregnancy-related stress(25).

However, a systematic scoping review found that the trimester of pregnancy has no relation to drug prescription misuse(16). A cross-sectional study by (26) also revealed that pregnant women during their first trimester of pregnancy are exposed to an increased risk of misuse of prescribed drugs. In African settings, apart from the misuse of prescribed drugs for pregnant women, most pregnant women subscribe to herbal medicine due to their local beliefs and perceptions of such drugs to the mother and the developing babies (27) In addition, a cross-sectional study conducted in the United States revealed that there was a gradual increase in the misuse of prescribed drugs during the various trimester of pregnancy and this could be attributed to the gradual increase in pregnancy pains from the first trimester through the second trimester and to the third trimester (13). Moreover, a similar study conducted in the United States found that pregnancy is accompanied by physiological alterations that can lead to the misuse of prescribed drugs to handle such changes in mechanisms that, result in pains and disorders. The study indicated that,

during these stages of pregnancy, the pregnant woman is at an increased risk of pregnancy-related disorders, therefore they may resort to medication use to cope with such disorders (28). These findings are consistent with the outcome of this current study. The complication that could arise from misusing prescribed drugs as a result of physiological alterations would be the interference of the growth of the foetus with subsequent birth abnormalities and organ malfunctions (29).

What could have accounted for the similarities of findings might be the anxiety and depression that some pregnant women may encounter during the start of their pregnancy(15). In addition, the series of pregnancy-related pains and disorders may also increase their chance of being exposed to opioids and analgesics which they may turn be addicted to such drugs (20).

With regards to the history of urinary tract infections and a pregnant woman's misuse of prescribed drugs, this current study found that pregnant women who have a history of urinary tract infections had a strong association with the misuse of prescribed drugs. This is because pregnancy accompanied by misuse of prescribed drugs decreases maternal immunity and as such exposes most pregnant women to acquiring infections such as urinary tract infections and respiratory tract infections. Urinary tract infections are common during pregnancy and this explains why pregnant women with previous exposure subscribe to antibiotics use during pregnancy (30). This compromises their immune system and this is consistent with the outcome of this study.

In Saudi Arabia, a cross-sectional study demonstrated that pregnant women who have experienced urinary tract infections have an increased risk of being exposed to antimicrobials due to their previous infections encountered (31). This finding also supports the outcome of this current study. Similarly, a study conducted by (32) indicated that anti-biotic prescription misuse remains important during conception as it is second to iron and food supplements.

The misuse of prescribed drugs (anti-biotics) among pregnant women has a long-term effect on the neonate and the mother. This is because even after the successful delivery of the baby, antibiotics can remain in the breast milk of the woman which has a consequence of exposing the neonate to drug resistance when the baby starts sucking the breast milk of the mother(33). The complications that could arise when pregnant women continue to misuse these common drugs during pregnancy are enormous. The misused of these common drugs disrupts the intake of nutrients in neonates which leads to potential teratogenic effects on the developing fetus(34). Moreover, neonates have a higher risk of being exposed to neonatal abstinence syndrome in addition to de-regulation of the innate adaptive immune system of the developing fetus leading to the reduced immune system and increased susceptibility to viral, bacterial, parasitic and fungal infections (35). Furthermore, misuse of prescribed drugs significantly contributes to anti-microbial resistance which has become a global concern for public health intervention (7). Another complication that arises when pregnant women misuse prescribed drugs is the significant economic burden on the mother (36). In addition, pregnant women may have a long stay at the hospital with subsequent economic loss(5). There is also a complication that arises from the stimulation of the brain by interfering with the cells and the central nervous system, thereby decreasing a pregnant woman's awareness of the immediate environment(11).

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study sought to determine drug prescription misuse among pregnant women attending antenatal care at the Presbyterian Hospital in the Dormaa Central Municipality. The study concluded that some of the pregnant women between the ages of 26 to 30 years who report to the facility antenatal care service misused prescribed drugs. This is the most fertile period for pregnant women and should they continue to misuse prescribed drugs, they are at an increased risk of harming their health and that of the developing baby of which some suffer from birth defects.

The study also concluded that about 31% of pregnant women in the municipality who attended antenatal services misused prescribed medications. This implies that, in every ten pregnant women who attended antenatal care, three are more likely to misuse prescribed drugs. This practice exposes pregnant women to multiple medication side effects on the maternal mother and the child. Children of such mothers sometimes suffer from low birth weight, mental retardations, and poor formation of baby body organs such as the brain.

Moreover, the study concluded that, among the common drugs prescribed to pregnant women, the most frequently misused medications were analgesics (paracetamol), anti-malarial and antibiotics. This means that a significant number of pregnant women who misused drugs frequently relied on these medications. Aside from the medication side effects posed on the pregnant mother and the unborn child, there is also a loss of income as most of these drugs are bought over the counter or in chemical shops, therefore is a possibility of an occurrence of economic deprivation of the mother. Also, the misuse of antibiotics exposes the unborn or the breastfeeding child to multiple drug resistance when exposed to disease-causing organisms such as bacteria and viruses during childhood.

Conception is a risk factor for drug prescription misuse aside from past exposure and experience with urinary tract infections. This implies that, at the start of pregnancy, pregnant women have an increased susceptibility to abusing prescribed drugs to cater for the onset of pregnancy-related disorders such as loss of appetite, mild cough, and tiredness among others. However, this can contribute to detrimental health effects on the pregnancy and the developing foetus.

Another conclusion the study made was that socio-demographic factors of pregnant women such as their status of employment determined their misuse of prescribed drugs. The state of employment of pregnant women is ascribed to their medication misuse. Therefore, the ability of a pregnant woman to spend most of her income purchasing medications may suffer from economic challenges which could make her unable to cater for the born child, thereby the possibility of the child suffering from poor nutritional requirements leading to a poor growth rate and well-being.

The Ministry of Health through its agencies such as the Ghana Health Service and the Christian Association of Ghana among others should intensify and sustain health education programmes targeted at pregnant women and medication use, and their effects through the mass media and local radio stations and at antenatal meetings.

The health stakeholders in the municipality should embark on continuous health education on a sustainable basis to create awareness of the harmful effects of misusing analgesics and antibiotics among pregnant women through social gatherings such as community durbar and organisational associations in the municipality.

Future studies should be conducted to explore qualitatively the determinants of prescribed medication abuse so that a fair and comprehensive idea of drug prescription misuse among pregnant women in the municipality can be realised.

Availability of data and materials

Data and materials for the study are available upon request from the corresponding authors

Consent for publication

Not applicable

Ethical approval and consent to participate

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the Christian Health Association of Ghana. Eligible respondents gave informed consent to participate in this study by signing or thumb-printing the consent form.

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