Achievement of ideal weight gain during pregnancy - Findings from Los Angeles Mommy and Baby Project

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Objective

Appropriate weight gain during pregnancy can improve birth outcomes. The Los Angeles Mommy and Baby (LAMB) project surveyed women who recently gave birth in Los Angeles County. In this analysis, we will examine racial disparity and factors associated with ideal weight gain. We will also explore how recommendations from the healthcare providers affect women in achieving ideal weight gain.

Background

Ideal Weight Gain

Helping women attain recommended weight gain during pregnancy is crucial for delivering healthy infants. Various studies suggest that gestational weight gain, especially late pregnancy weight gain, is associated with infant outcome. Low weight gain is associated with prematurity, and high weight gain is associated with preterm birth, gestational diabetes, overweight offspring, and in extreme cases, fetal death.

Excessive weight gain during pregnancy is also positively associated with long-term postpartum weight retention. The prevalence of obesity has been increasing among American women, which makes prevention of excessive gestational weight gain ever more important.

The LAMB Project

Los Angeles County is one of the most diverse places in the U.S. Over 150,000 babies are born in the County every year. Due to a lack of comprehensive maternal and infant health indicators in Los Angeles County, the Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health (MCAH) programs conducted the Los Angeles Mommy and Baby (LAMB) project to establish a surveillance system to monitor maternal and infant health in the County every two years since 2005.

The survey examined areas that are known to have an impact on birth outcomes, including

- Preconception health
- Prenatal care
- Maternal medical conditions
- Psychosocial risk factors
- Behavioral risk factors

Methods

Design: Population-based survey. Multi-level clustered sampling, over sampling on low birth weight and preterm births (LBW/PT) as well as African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American births.

Time frame: 2007

Participants: Women who recently gave birth in Los Angeles County

Questions related to pregnancy weight gain in the LAMB survey include:

- Body weight just before pregnancy
- Body weight just before giving birth
- Preconception care nutrition and weight recommendation
- Prenatal care weight recommendation
- Food insecurity
- Exercise during pregnancy
- Skipping meals during pregnancy

To enhance the response rate, the LAMB Project followed CDC PRAMS procedures as described in figure 2. All respondents were given a $20 gift certificate.

Results

The project is ongoing and preliminary results are shown here (N=1258).

Among the 1107 women who completed the questions about weight, about 35% of the mothers achieved ideal weight gain, 38% of mothers had excessive weight gain, and 27% of mothers gained too little.

Bivariate analysis (Figure 3) showed that African American (54%) and Latina (43%) mothers are more likely to be overweight or obese before pregnancy. African American (47%) and White (45%) mothers are more likely to gain too much weight during pregnancy (Figure 4).

Controlling for age, race, marital status and pre-pregnancy weight, mothers who did not receive medical recommendations, or said to receive recommendations that are not ideal are about two times more likely to fall outside the recommended weight gain ranges (Figure 5). Mothers who skipped meals are also 46% more likely to fall outside the recommended weight gain ranges.

Relating to birth outcome, mothers who gained too little tend to give birth to low birth weight babies (<5 lb 8 oz) (OR=1.7 [1.0,2.8]), and excessive weight gain is associated with macrosomia (birth weight more than 8 lb 13 oz) (OR=1.7 [1.1, 2.7]).

Conclusion

Only one in three women surveyed adhered to the ideal weight gain recommendations, and compliance varied among racial/ethnic populations. About one third of the women said they did not receive weight recommendation either. These results show that much effort is needed to emphasize the importance of appropriate weight gain during prenatal care, and to empower women to achieve healthy weight before and during pregnancy. Healthcare workers should play a more important role to reduce preventable risks of obesity in this critical period.

This could be done by including accurate and culturally-appropriate weight gain recommendations in prenatal care visits, particularly for mothers with high body mass index.

Healthcare providers should also emphasize on helping women lose the weight they gain during pregnancy. Nutrition counseling should be made available during and after pregnancy for mothers. Further research should focus on effective strategies of weight management to women during pre- and inter-conception periods.

Limitations and Next Steps

Previous studies indicated that self-reported height and weight are reasonable proxies of the actual height and weight. However, some women no longer remember weight gain recommendations made by the doctor by 1/2 to 1 year after delivery. Other lifestyle recommendations besides a specific weight recommendation given by health care providers may not be captured in the survey. We plan to analyze the data further by neighborhood factors such as food establishments and availability of parks.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the LAMB team: Diana Lui, Marian Eldahaby, Cathleen Benis, Carmen Gutierrez, Yvonna Horton, Martha Martinez, and Karen M Collier for making the project possible.

For further information, please visit www.LAAMmb.org