

Original Research Article

OCCURRENCE RATE OF HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV), HEPATITIS B VIRUS (HBV) AND HEPATITIS C VIRUS (HCV) CO - INFECTION AMONG EXPECTANT MOTHERS ATTENDING ANTENATAL CLINIC IN RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY TEACHING HOSPITAL

ABSTRACT

The global burden of co-infection with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B and C virus (HBV and HCV) has a negative impact in Sub-Saharan Africa. When HIV, HBV and HCV co-exist, they become life threatening and with high fatality rate particularly in gestation in which transmission occurs vertically, causing fetal and neonatal hepatitis. The study aimed at examining the occurrence rate of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis B virus (HBV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) co - infection among expectant mothers attending antenatal clinic in Rivers State University Teaching Hospital (RSUTH). The study population comprised of one hundred and fifty (150) pregnant women. Venous blood was used in the study and screened for hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg), anti-HCV, and anti-HIV antibodies using commercially available immunoassay test kits. The prevalence of HCV, HIV and HBsAg among the pregnant subjects in relation to age group 21-30 and 31-40 in the study revealed a seropositive percentage of 0.7% and 1.3%. The other groups, however, showed no positive result among the three viruses. Furthermore, 0.7% of the pregnant women in their first, second and third trimester were co-infected with HCV and HBsAg while 1.3% out of 36.7% and 0.7% out of 61.3% of pregnant women within the age groups 21-30 and 31-40 respectively were seropositive for HIV. In relation to gestational age, it was seen from the study that 0.7% of the pregnant women in their first, second and third trimester were seropositive for HCV and HBsAg respectively, while 2% of the HIV seropositive pregnant women were in their first trimester. The overall seroprevalence of HCV, HIV and HBsAg as revealed in the study showed that infection was found to be 2% respectively among the pregnant women. The reduced prevalence of hepatitis B (HBsAg), hepatitis C (HCV) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection observed in the study among pregnant women attending antenatal care in the Rivers State University Teaching Hospital may be attributed to the increase in the awareness amongst the general populace in Port Harcourt especially couples about the consequences of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B as well as Hepatitis C. In other words, there is reduction in seroprevalence of HBsAg, HCV and HIV which is premised on the efficacy of sensitization particularly on HBV vaccination and preventive protocols for HIV.

Keywords: *Human immunodeficiency virus, Hepatitis B and C Virus, Co-infection; pregnant women; seroprevalence*

INTRODUCTION

It has globally been established that the commonly identifiable viruses are human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B virus (HBV), and hepatitis C virus. They are significantly prominent among other disease-causing agents. The impressions they make, transcend humans and greatly affect Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of States with greater consequence on humanity[7]. HIV also has imbedded in it; similar features as are prevalent in HBV. These elements are vertical and horizontal transmission, injection drug use and sexual activities [48,31]. Having pointed out this problem, the management of patients co-infected with HIV and HBV, HCV have been reviewed and guidelines provided in recent times. [31,17,42].

It has been established that there is a noticeable difference in the prevalence of HIV, HBV and HCV coinfection of infected people occasioned by geographical region and behaviour of infected people. [31]. HIV and HBV have similar pattern of spreading and risk factors. This is the reason so many climes that are affected by high HIV are also affected by HBV [51,8]. Globally, HIV accounts for about 40 million, HBV is responsible for about 370 million chronic infections and 130 million is apportioned to HCV [2].

Approximately 4–5 million have HCV co-infection while nearly 2–4 million individuals who suffer from HIV are also infected with chronic HBV co-infection [45]. The degree of occurrence varies tremendously from one clime over a period of time. It is on that premise that observation studies are needed to monitor the level and method of occurrence of these viruses and to execute relevant preventive protocols. HIV, HBV and HCV infections are endemic in Africa, but their rates vary considerably within African countries. The occurrence rates of HBV and HCV measure between 3–20% and 1–26%, respectively. Going further, above 63% of those infected with HIV globally live in Africa, and in 2008, about 2.7 million fresh HIV infections were profiled in Sub-Saharan Africa alone [43]. The area most ravaged by HIV is Africa as compared to other areas in the world with 35 million individuals infected with HIV and 670,000 recent HIV infections in 2020. [47]. In 2009, the approximate population of people living with HIV virus in Nigeria is 3.6%. and the country recorded the greatest number of deaths worldwide (220,000) after South Africa [5].

Hepatitis B infection is relatively high in Africa as it varies tremendously around the globe. It is also noted that Africa has the second highest number of chronically HBV – infected individuals [26].

Globally, Hepatitis C virus infection (HCV) affects nearly 3.9 million persons. [44]. Liver cirrhosis and liver cell carcinoma is largely caused by HCV and it proliferates in Africa. [38,12,20]. The greatest prevalence rate of HCV (5.3%) occurs in Sub-Saharan Africa with a similar dominance in HIV. [25].

In Nigeria and sub - Saharan Africa, hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) are endemic and put at above 35 million and 75 million respectively. [28]. Prescribed combination of effective antiretroviral treatment is encouraged in the management of symptoms in this population. In fact, chronic hepatitis is considered when prescribing drugs to treat HIV and hepatitis diseases [21]. Hence, it becomes imperative to know the epidemiology and occurrence of the three viruses, and their consequence on the immune system.

It is a fact that HIV infection has spread greatly in Africa, and information about the prevalence of HBV and HCV among HIV infected individuals are reduced. The problem of liver disease in Africa owing to serious HBV and/or HCV has become a thing of great concern especially in those infected with HIV [18]. HIV increases the success rate of serious liver diseases related to HBV and HCV. Some HIV patients manifest viral hepatitis. The implication of this is that liver diseases will seemingly show obvious causes of morbidity and mortality among HIV infected persons in Africa, similar to the happenings worldwide [16].

According to several reports, co-infection helps rapid production and reduces clearance of the viruses, as a result of weakened innate and adaptive immune responses [19,46]. Attention should

be given to the HIV-positive sub-population because of its huge implication on public health which co-infection with HBV can have.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design

The study is cross-sectional retrospective in nature. Structured questionnaire was used to capture data on socio-demographic, obstetric, knowledge of HBV and HIV.

Study Area and Study Population

The study population comprised of one hundred and fifty (150) pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic of the Rivers State University Teaching Hospital, Port Harcourt.

Ethical Clearance/ Informed Consent

Permission was given by the Department of Medical Laboratory Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt to carry out this study. Oral informed consent was obtained from the respective subjects before enrolment. Information was obtained using questionnaires to obtain the socio-demographic characteristics and presence of risk factors.

Eligibility criteria

Exclusion Criteria

Non-pregnant women were not included in this study

Pregnant women whose consent were not obtained to enrolment in this study were also not included

Inclusion Criteria

Pregnant women, no matter the age; gestational age or parity were enrolled in the study.

Only those who agreed and gave oral consent were included in the study

Sample collection /Analysis

4ml of whole blood was collected aseptically into a potassium ethylene diamine tetracetic acid (K₃EDTA) sample container. The sample was screened within 24 hours of collection using commercially available immunoassay test kits.

Statistical Analysis

The percentage frequency of HIV, Hepatitis B virus and Hepatitis C virus amongst the studied subjects was obtained using MS Excel statistical package and information represented in tables.

Results

Demographic Features of the Study Population

150 pregnant women attending antenatal clinic at the Rivers State University Teaching Hospital (RSUTH) were used for this study. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 1. Only one of the women was below 20 years representing 0.7% of the total population. The ones between the ages of 21-30, 31-40 and 41-50 were 55(36.7), 92(61.3) and 2(1.3) in the same order. Three (2%) of the women were **unmarried** parents, while 147(93.3%) were married. Educated women made up a larger percentage of the pregnant women with about 85.3% comparative to the 14.7% for those with secondary school education and below. 85(56.7%), 39(26%) and 26(17.3%) of the women were in their first, second and third gestational age in the same order. Estimated 34% (51/150) of the women were nulliparous while 48% (72/150) had 1-3 children and 18% (27/150) had 4 children and above. A greater number of the women were in **monogamous(women married to Men with one wife)** family setting (147/150) and the remaining 2% (3/150) were in **polygamous(women married to men with more than one wife)** family settings.

Table 1: Demographic Details of Participants

Subjects		Frequency (%)
Age group	< 20	1 (0.7)
	21-30	55 (36.7)
	31-40	92 (61.3)
	41-50	2 (1.3)
	> 51	0

	Total	150 (100)
Marital Status	Unmarried	3 (2)
	Married	147 (98)
	Total	150 (100)
Education	Nil	0
	Primary	0
	Secondary	22 (14.7)
	Tertiary	128 (85.3)
	Total	150 (100)
Gestational Age	1 st Trimester	85 (56.7)
	2 nd Trimester	39 (26)
	3 rd Trimester	26 (17.3)
	Total	150 (100)
Number of Children	None	51 (34)
	1-3	72 (48)
	> 4	27 (18)
	Total	150 (100)
Type of Family	Monogamous	147 (98)
	Polygamous	3 (2)
	Total	150 (100)

The Percentage Distribution of Hepatitis C, Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Hepatitis B Virus Status amongst the Pregnant Subjects with Respect to Age Group and Gestational Age.

The prevalence of HCV, HIV and HBsAg amongst the pregnant subjects in relation to age group of 21-30 and 31-40 in the study revealed a seropositive percentage of 0.7% and 1.3% and a seronegative percentage of 36% and 60% (HCV and HIV) and 1.3% and 0.7% for HBsAg in the same order. The other groups, however, showed no positive result among the three viruses.

In relation to gestational age, it was seen from the study that 0.7% of the pregnant women in their first, second and third trimester were seropositive for HCV and HBsAg respectively, while 2% of the HIV seropositive pregnant women were in their first trimester. Detailed information is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Hepatitis C, Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Hepatitis B Virus Status amongst the Pregnant Subjects with Respect to Age Group and Gestational Age

		HCV		HIV		HBsAg	
Subjects		Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)	Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)	Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)
Age group	< 20	0	1 (0.7)	0	1 (0.7)	0	1 (0.7)
	21-30	1 (0.7)	54 (36)	2 (1.3)	53 (35.3)	1 (0.7)	54 (36)
	31-40	2 (1.3)	90 (60)	1 (0.7)	91 (60.7)	2 (1.3)	90 (60)
	41-50	0	2 (1.3)	0	2 (1.3)	0	2 (1.3)
	> 51	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)
Gestational Age	1 st Trimester	1 (0.7)	84 (56)	3 (2)	82 (54.7)	1 (0.7)	84 (56)
	2 nd Trimester	1 (0.7)	38 (25.3)	0	(26)	1 (0.7)	38 (25.3)
	3 rd Trimester	1 (0.7)	25 (16.7)	0	(17.3)	1 (0.7)	25 (16.7)
	Total	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)

Percentage Distribution of Hepatitis C (HCV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis B Virus (HBsAg) Status amongst the Pregnant Subjects According to Marital Status and Education

In examining the prevalence of HIV, HBsAg and HCV, with respect to marital status, amongst the pregnant subjects in the study exposed a seropositive percentage of 2%. **unmarried** pregnant women were all seronegative. Seroprevalence of HIV, HBsAg and HCV among pregnant women with first degree was 0.7%, 2% and 1.3% respectively while pregnant women with senior secondary certificate had a seroprevalence of 1.3% and 0.7% for HIV and HBsAg infection respectively. This information can be deduced from Table 3 below:

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Hepatitis C (HCV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis B Virus (HBsAg) Status amongst the Pregnant Subjects According to Marital Status and Education

Subjects		HCV Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)	HIV Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)	HBsAg Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)
Marital Status	unmarried	0	3 (2)	0	3 (2)	0	3 (2)
	Married	3 (2)	144 (96)	3 (2)	144 (96)	3 (2)	144 (96)
	Total	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)
Education	Nil	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Secondary	0	22 (14.7)	2 (1.3)	20 (13.3)	1 (0.7)	21 (14)
	Tertiary	3 (2)	125 (83.3)	1 (0.7)	127 (84.7)	2 (1.3)	126 (84)
	Total	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)

Percentage Distribution of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis B Virus (HBsAg) Status amongst the Pregnant Subjects According to Family Type and Number of Children

Occurrence of HIV, HBsAg and HCV amongst the pregnant subjects according to family type in the study revealed that women with 1-3 children had the highest seropositive cases for HIV, HCV and HBsAg of **(1.3%, 2%, 2%)** each respectively. Except for 1 seropositive case for HIV out of 51 women in the group with no previous pregnancy, other groups had no seropositive cases. Pregnant women only, in monogamous **(women married to Men with one wife)** families, were seropositive for HIV, HCV and HBsAg with 2% seroprevalence respectively. This can be deduced from Table 4.

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Hepatitis B Virus (HBsAg) Status amongst the Pregnant Subjects According to Family Type and Number of Children

Subjects			HCV		HIV		HBsAg	
			Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)	Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)	Seropositive n (%)	Seronegative n (%)
Number of Children	None		0	51 (34)	1 (0.7)	50 (33.3)	0	51 (34)
	1-3		3 (2)	69 (46)	2 (1.3)	70 (46.7)	3 (2)	69 (46)
	> 4		0	27 (18)	0	27 (18)	0	27 (18)
	Total		3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)
Type of Family	Monogamous		3 (2)	144 (96)	3 (2)	144 (96)	3 (2)	144 (96)
	Polygamous		0	3 (2)	0	3 (2)	0	3 (2)
	Total		3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)	3 (2)	147 (98)

Discussion

The overall seroprevalence of HBsAg, HIV and HCV infection was found to be 2% in the same order among the pregnant women attending the River State University Teaching Hospital. According to WHO [49], endemic rates are classified according to states. States with low rates are < 2%, intermediate endemic rates (2-8%) and high endemic rates (> 8%) positive for HBV. Our observation in this study shows intermediate endemicity of HBV infection as 2.0% in the occurrence of HBsAg among pregnant women attending antenatal. A report made in Southeast Nigeria by Munoz *et al.* [29] showed 2.2% occurrence rate of HBV which is in close agreement with our study. In South-South Nigeria, Similarly, Obi *et al.* [33] revealed the occurrence rate of 2.9% among pregnant women in Port Harcourt. The total occurrence rate of HIV for pregnant women seen in this study was 2.0%, this is lower than the 7.2% occurrence of HIV noted in a study conducted among pregnant women in Benin Nigeria by Oladeinde *et al.* [36] and 10.2% reported by Oladeinde *et al.* [37] among pregnant women attending antenatal clinic in Okada village, Edo State, Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Health Nigeria has reported downward trend of HIV infection among pregnant women as seen in its studies which shows HIV occurrence rate of 5.8%, 5.0% and 4.6% for 2001, 2003 and 2008 in the same order [13,14,15]. This may be the reason for the low occurrence rate among pregnant women in this study.

It is shown worldwide statistically that 15% of HIV positive females fall within the group of 15 – 24 years. Okonko *et al.*[35] showed that the greatest occurrence was found among persons of 25-31 years.

Furthermore, some studies showed the dominance of females within the age bracket of 20 – 29 years [3,34].

Co-infection with Hepatitis C Virus (HCV) is hardly seen in persons living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) however, where it occurs, it leads to treatment complications. Most patients with HIV do not know that they may also be infected with HCV [51], but epidemiological studies have revealed that HIV and HCV co-infection is gaining global recognition because the mode of transmission is the same [25]. Ejeta and Dabsu [11], revealed that occurrence rate of HCV/HIV co-infection was 0.23% while Desalegn *et al.* [9] noted a 0.93% occurrence rate for HBV/HIV co-infection. This finding differed from study in South - Eastern Nigeria where women aged between 25-29 years and 20-30 years respectively were found to be at a significant risk of HIV/HBV co- infection [22,32]. The Nigerian researchers attributed this to the higher prevalence of HIV as well as the likelihood of high sexual activity in these age groups.

It has been observed in Nigeria that the seroprevalence of HCV reported as 2% in this study is greater than the 0.5% stated in Gwagwalada by Agarry *et al.* [1], 0.5% verified by Buseri *et al.* [4] and 0.4% in Calabar by Mboto *et al.* [27]. The results of this study were in tandem with the 2.1% quoted for Nigeria in the hepatitis C prevalence data worldwide, published by Lavanchy [23] and also the 1.86% found among pregnant women in University of Benin Teaching Hospital by Onakewhor *et al.* [40]. In another development, research by Duru *et al.* [10] performed in Benin City revealed an occurrence rate of 5% which is greater than the rate seen in the present study. The occurrence rate of 1.8% seen among pregnant women in Cameroon obtained by Richard *et al.* [41] and the 2% and 2.1% noted in Burkina Faso and Gabon respectively by Ndong-Atome *et al.* [30] though studies conducted in other African countries, are in consonant with findings from our study. The peculiarities in the mode of transmission of HCV which may be dictated by socio-cultural and environmental factors are related to the variation which occurred. From this study, it was noticed that the HCV infection was greater among pregnant women who were within the age bracket of 31-40 years (1.3%) when compared to the 0.7% recorded for women of 21-30 years. This agrees with a studies by Mac *et al.* [24] and Chinenye *et al.* [6]. which showed a systematic pattern.

On the contrary, a study by Olokoba *et al.* [39] in Yola, Nigeria showed progressive increase in the occurrence of HBsAg when the pregnant women were grouped according to age groups, with a rise in the 25–29 years (2.2%) age group and a downward fall in 40–44 years age group (0.9%).

CONCLUSION

The study depicted a low rate of occurrence of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), hepatitis B (HBsAg), and hepatitis C (HCV) which points to the increase in the awareness created in different media in Port Harcourt with particular interest in married people about the effects of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C as well as preventing

HBV through vaccination and preventive measures for HIV by health care professionals in the antenatal clinic of Rivers State University Teaching Hospital.

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