

**Epidemiology/Genetics Abstracts**

**Title:** AWARENESS OF SPINA BIFIDA AND PERICONCEPTIONAL USE OF FOLIC ACID AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN IN A DEVELOPING ECONOMY

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**Background:** Folate deficiency in pregnant women is a recognized cause of spina bifida. We sought to establish the level of awareness of spina bifida as well as the use of folate supplementation among pregnant women in a developing economy.

**Method:** Interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to obtain information from one hundred and sixty randomly-selected pregnant women attending antenatal clinics at the author's institution. Demographic information and information on parity, folic acid use, knowledge of spina bifida including its cause, prevention and treatment were obtained.

**Results:** The mean age of the women was 32years (range: 22-40years). Forty of them (25%) were primigravida. Most of them are educated with 87.5% in or completed tertiary-level education while 10(6.3%) have no formal western education. The average gestational age at antenatal clinic booking was 18.5 weeks (range: 8 – 32 weeks) while the average gestational age at commencement of folic acid use was 18 weeks (range: 6 – 29 weeks). None uses folic acid in the periconception period. Only 25% of the women had heard of spina bifida and of these only 25% know what spina bifida is. None of them had seen the lesion before and none believed that it is a result of a curse or witchcraft. None of them had a family history of, or a friend whose child(ren) has/have spina bifida. Twenty (12.5%) of the women know that folic acid use prevents its occurrence however all the women are willing to receive periconceptional folate supplementation. Only 10 (6.3%) of them are aware that the lesion can be surgically repaired.

**Conclusion:** There is paucity of knowledge about spina bifida among Nigerian pregnant women despite the high level of formal education attained by them. We advocate an aggressive public health campaign to enlighten the women about spina bifida and encourage periconceptional folate supplementation.