Prenatal Genetic Testing: Effect of Health Literacy in Hispanic Women

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Background

- Pregnancy can signify joy and anticipation for expectant parents, but also uncertainty and anxiety regarding the health of mother and baby.
- Decisions regarding care such as prenatal genetic testing (PGT) are part of routine pregnancy care.
- The decision not to test may be related to attitudes towards pregnancy termination, often influenced by religious beliefs, or lack of understanding regarding PGT.
- Prior researchers offer support that increased knowledge of PGT increases uptake of PGT. The results of PGT can offer couples valuable information about the baby they may face. Nonetheless, many couples and Hispanics in particular may forego this testing.

Aims & Hypothesis

Aims: Identify how perceptions and knowledge of PGT influences uptake of PGT in a sample of hard-to-reach underrepresented Hispanic pregnant women in South Texas.

Hypothesis: Hispanic women with higher health literacy will have higher uptake of PGT.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by a grant from the Global Institute for Hispanic Health.

Methods

30 Hispanic pregnant women were recruited from a high-risk prenatal clinic in South Texas. Surveys and semi-structured interviews were designed to examine knowledge and attitudes of participants toward PGT. Surveys included tools to assess acculturation, familism, religiosity/spirituality, and genetic literacy. Measurements related to these constructs have been used in other published works and, there is strong evidence for both their reliability and validity.

Findings

93% of participants were US-born, and 43% had household income less than $20,000. 83% of participants reported their knowledge of PGT as average or lower. Qualitative data showed that the majority of participants had positive perceptions of PGT despite their limited knowledge of the test: “you won’t be worried so much.” Participants indicated that PGT results increased their awareness, relieved their stress, and helped them and their families to be financially and psychologically prepared for what is to come. For example, one participant stated “…just preparing me for what’s to come.” Others mentioned religious beliefs: “God’s choice…He’s not going to give you something you can’t handle” and “trying to be positive and pray that everything will be okay.”

Discussion

These findings provide data to identify pregnant Hispanic women’s perceptions and knowledge of PGT and factors that may influence their decision to undergo PGT. These findings also serve as the basis to plan and develop an evidence-based education intervention to increase PGT uptake among Hispanic pregnant women, an underserved population in South Texas. With a better understanding of factors influencing their perceptions of PGT, culturally-appropriate education tools can be developed.

References