

Validity of the vaginal discharge algorithm among pregnant and non-pregnant women in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract:

OBJECTIVE: To evaluate the validity of different algorithms for the diagnosis of gonococcal and chlamydial infections among pregnant and non-pregnant women consulting health services for vaginal discharge in Nairobi, Kenya. **METHODS:** Cross sectional study among 621 women with complaints of vaginal discharge in three city council clinics between April and August 1997. Women were interviewed and examined for symptoms and signs of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Specimens were obtained for laboratory diagnosis of genital infections, HIV, and syphilis. The data were used to evaluate the Kenyan flow chart as well as several other generated algorithms. **RESULTS:** The mean age was 24 years and 334 (54%) were pregnant. The overall prevalence rates were: 50% candidiasis, 23% trichomoniasis, 9% bacterial vaginosis, 7% gonorrhoea, 9% chlamydia, 7% syphilis, and 22% HIV. In non-pregnant women, gonococcal and chlamydial infection was significantly associated with (1) demographic and behavioural risk markers such as being single, younger than 20 years, multiple sex partners in the previous 3 months; (2) symptom fever; and (3) signs including presence of yellow or bloody vaginal discharge, cervical mucopus, cervical erythema, and friability. Among pregnant women only young age, dysuria, and fever were significantly associated with cervical infection. However, none of these variables was either sensitive or specific enough for the diagnosis of cervical infection. Several algorithms were generated and applied to the study data. The algorithm including risk markers performed slightly better than the current Kenyan algorithm. **CONCLUSION:** STIs form a major problem in the Nairobi area and should be addressed accordingly. None of the tested algorithms for the treatment of vaginal discharge would constitute a marked improvement of the existing flow chart. Hence, better detection tools for the specific aetiology of vaginal discharge are urgently needed