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Some reproductive health indicators in Ukraine

A study with special emphasis on factors behind induced abortion and perinatal mortality

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Abstract

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Objectives: To study indicators specifically reflecting the reproductive health of Ukrainian women and to analyse factors behind the indicators.

Methods: Induced abortion and maternal mortality were studied in some countries/regions of the former Soviet Union, using official statistics. Abortion rates, contraceptive practices and intentions in Ukrainian women were analysed by a large self-completion survey in 1996, and by a classroom questionnaire to first year medical students in 1999 in Donetsk, Ukraine. Totally, 1694 women and 689 students participated. Perinatal mortality was studied, applying the Nordic-Baltic perinatal death classification to all cases in the Donetsk region in 1997-98 (n=1126) and in Denmark in 1996 (n=540). Clinical guidelines, use of technology and rates of interventions in the two regions were analysed.

Results: Abortion remains a major method of fertility control and abortion-related mortality contributes to maternal deaths. Perinatal mortality rate is twice as high in the Donetsk region as in Denmark. A substantial proportion of sexually active women do not practice contraception. Modern methods of contraception are not widely used. There is a lack of knowledge in reproductive health issues and negative attitude to OCs. There is a positive attitude towards abortion as an acceptable fertility control method and of having abortion instead of using OCs or IUD. Poor economy is an obstacle to the use of contraceptive methods associated with a cost. Lack of experience with contraception reduces the intention to use any method in the future. Being single, younger than 19 years, living with parents, having a positive attitude towards abortion as fertility control method, having a history of previous childbirth and/or abortion are important factors associated with pregnancy termination. Antepartum deaths of growth-retarded fetuses, intrapartum and neonatal deaths associated with asphyxia are more common in Ukraine than in Denmark, particularly among premature infants. Lack of evidence-based clinical guidelines and adequate resources for fetal monitoring during pregnancy and labour, together with negative attitudes towards, and limited resources for, instrumental delivery, contribute to high perinatal mortality.

Conclusion: Better reproductive education/information of all strata of society is needed. Implementation of evidence-based guidelines in perinatal medicine, where international collaboration can be of great value, should be a matter of high priority.

Keywords: Ukraine, induced abortion, contraception, perinatal mortality, self-completion survey, perinatal audit

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