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Vaginitis among Pregnant Women in Southern Provinces of Palestine

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Background: Vaginitis is an inflammation of the vagina that can lead to discharge. The cause is usually a change in the balance of vaginal bacteria or an infection. The most common types of vaginitis are bacterial vaginosis and yeast infection. The former results from an overgrowth of bacteria that are naturally present in the vagina and upsetting the natural balance. Yeast infections are usually caused by a naturally occurring fungus called *Candida albicans*. The prevalence of vaginitis varies between countries and within the same country, and to our knowledge, no data is available for vaginitis in Southern Palestine.

Objectives: Our study is aimed to investigate the prevalence of group B *Streptococcus* (GBS) and *Candida albicans* in pregnant women in Bethlehem and Hebron and to examine the discrepancies between clinical diagnosis depending on signs, symptoms, and laboratory outcomes using microbial cultures. The associated risk factors will also be studied.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in the southern West Bank from January 2022 to February 2023. Low vaginal swab samples were collected from pregnant women (above 30 weeks of pregnancy). Swab cultures were transported to the laboratory and grown on blood agar. The cultures were then tested with bacitracin, and confirmed by Streptococcal Grouping Kit using Latex Agglutination. The same cultures were used to identify yeast infections. A structured questionnaire was delivered to pregnant women at the time of collecting swabs. All data were analyzed using SPSS-version 25 and a P-value <0.05 is considered significant.



Results: A total of 348 patients in Bethlehem and Hebron were included in the study. A total of 16 GBS cases were detected by means of clinical complaints together with positive vaginal culture in all cases. The prevalence of GBS in 291 pregnant women who visited AL-Dibs Hospital in Bethlehem was 3.7% as 11 GBS-infected cases were found among pregnant women. In Hebron, 57 samples collected from the private Gynecology clinics were analyzed, 5 GBS-infected cases were detected, and the prevalence of GBS was 8.7%. Seventeen yeast infection cases out of the 57 samples collected from Hebron were detected with a prevalence of 30%.

Conclusions: The significance of this research is to increase women's awareness about genital tract infections, which may lead to abortion and other serious problems and may expose newborns to a high risk of GBS disease if their mother tests positive for the GBS late in pregnancy. Implementing strict restrictions on the use of antibiotics without medical prescription, and keeping personal hygiene practices among pregnant women are in demand.

Keywords: Vaginitis, GBS, yeast infections, pregnant women.