Exposure to secondhand smoke among Qatari pregnant women

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Background:
The harmful effects of smoking during pregnancy on the health of the mother, fetus and newborn have been well documented in the literature. These include, low birth weight, prematurity and still birth. The negative effect of smoking on health is not restricted to active smokers as studies have shown that exposure to secondhand smoke (SHS) during pregnancy also poses risks on the mother and the fetus. To our knowledge there has not yet been any study that researched exposure to SHS among Qatari pregnant women.

Objectives:
The objectives are: 1) to estimate the prevalence and associated factors related to exposure to SHS during pregnancy among Qatari women and 2) to estimate the level of knowledge of health risks and attitudes towards tobacco smoking.

Methods:
A cross-sectional study using a convenience sample of Qatari pregnant women was done at the Women’s Hospital which is the main hospital for deliveries for Hamad Medical Corporation, the largest health service provider in Qatar. We targeted pregnant women both in public and private clinics inside the hospital. A total of 357 women were approached and data were collected on 305 women, yielding a response rate of 85.4%. Data collection took place between January 2012 and May 2012.

Results:
A very high proportion (81%) responders reported exposure to SHS. Exposure outside the house was higher than that inside the house. Husbands were the main source of exposure to SHS inside the house and restaurants and cafés were the main places of exposure outside the house. Although women’s knowledge about the harmful effects of exposure to SHS was high it was not associated with exposure status. Being in a smoke free house was a protective factor against exposure to SHS.

Conclusion:
Pregnant women, their fetus and new born are in danger due to exposure to SHS. Public health awareness interventions should target pregnant women and in particular their husbands. Moreover, there should be stricter implementation of smoking bans in restaurants and cafés.