

Publication

A descriptive qualitative case study of the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of pregnant women on Unguja island, Zanzibar, towards antischistosomal treatment

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Author(s) De Rosa, E.; Person, B.; Knopp, S.; Ali, J. M.; Lyimo, J. H.; Kabole, F.; Rollinson, D.

Author(s) at UniBasel [Knopp, Stefanie](#) ;

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Many countries exclude pregnant and lactating women from mass drug administration (MDA) programmes with praziquantel against schistosomiasis due to historic safety concerns over drug use during gestation and breast feeding. More than 10 years of empirical evidence from the field and a growing body of dedicated research has prompted the World Health Organisation and schistosomiasis control initiatives to advocate the inclusion of this vulnerable group into MDA. This qualitative descriptive case study explored, over a five-week period, the subjective experiences, perceptions, opinions, and attitudes of pregnant women attending government supported clinics on Unguja island, United Republic of Tanzania, towards praziquantel use during pregnancy in MDA programmes. The aim of the study was to identify and determine how to overcome potential barriers to effective use of MDA medications during pregnancy. Additionally, it was to determine trusted communication channels for future messaging and discover behavioural and community opportunities to increase participation of pregnant women in future MDA efforts. A 60-minute, semi-structured qualitative interview was undertaken with 25 pregnant women recruited from 4 health centres on Unguja along with testing for *Schistosoma haematobium* infection. Using a modified-grounded theory approach, narrative data were transcribed, coded and analysed using a thematic analysis of the emergent themes. Women reported they rely on traditional home remedies to stay healthy during pregnancy. Influenced by their mothers, husbands and neighbours, women predominately made medication choices during pregnancy and breastfeeding based on what they heard at home. Most women had been excluded from government MDA programmes in the past due to pregnancy. Women valued healthcare services for antenatal education and pregnancy advice. Women reported they would trust and follow direction from healthcare providers about taking praziquantel during pregnancy. Antenatal clinics offer an excellent opportunity to educate and expand praziquantel treatment to this cohort. Efforts should be augmented with training for providers and behavioural education for the community as a whole and family members of pregnant women.

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