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The use of traditional medicine by women during pregnancy in Sub-Saharan Africa: A scoping review

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to describe the traditional medicines utilized in sub-Saharan Africa, during pregnancy and their possible adverse effects.

Method: A scoping review was used; five databases (PubMed, Cinahl, Cinahl plus, Wiley Online, Scopus and SAGE) were the search for the collection of data, with specific search terms such as sub-Saharan Africa, adverse effects, traditional medicine, and complementary alternative medicine, pregnancy, labor and postpartum. The literature had to be in English, have a full abstract. Data included literature from sub-Saharan Africa of both quantitative, qualitative articles and grey literature in peer-reviewed journals published between January 2007 and August 2018. A data extraction sheet was developed to record the authors, year study was published, the country study was conducted, research aim and question, participants and methods and the key themes.

Results: Results revealed three themes such as factors that precipitate the use of traditional medicine by women, and that women had their own reasons for using traditional medicines and the prevalence of traditional medicine use in sub-Saharan Africa.

Conclusion: There is significant use of traditional medicine amongst women in sub-Saharan Africa to treat various conditions related to pregnancy. However, little is known of the adverse effects that these traditional medicines may have on the women or the unborn baby. This lack of knowledge poses a risk to both mother and the unborn baby; therefore, further investigation is required on the use and safety of traditional medicines.

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