

Cuba's prenatal program improves low birth weights, study finds

September 25 2012

(Medical Xpress)—Comprehensive prenatal care can decrease the rate of low birth weights, according to a study led by Dr. Yasmin Neggers, a University of Alabama researcher and professor of human nutrition and hospitality management.

Neggers and her colleague, Dr. Kristi Crowe, UA assistant professor of nutrition, traveled to Havana, Cuba during February 2012 to conduct research on the relationship between comprehensive prenatal care and rate of [low birth weight](#) in this developing country.

Low birth weight, or LBW, – less than five and a half pounds at birth – is a significant factor affecting [neonatal mortality](#) and predictor of [newborn health](#).

Neggers, whose main research focus is nutrition during pregnancy, was intrigued by Cuba's low rate of LBW.

"Cuba, being a third-world, developing country, has a LBW rate that is half that of Alabama. It was kind of surprising."

She and Crowe, assistant professor of nutrition, looked at the factors that are usually linked to low birth weight such as smoking, gaining weight during pregnancy and [alcohol intake](#).

All of those factors were not in Cuba's favor.

"All the typical risk factors that cause low birth rate are better in the United States and Alabama," Neggers said. "So, we looked at prenatal care, the care before and during pregnancy, and there was the difference. Prenatal care in Cuba is so much better than typical U.S. care, especially compared to Alabama."

Pregnant women in Cuba are provided free prenatal visits to their doctors very frequently, get adequate and regular screenings and [health checks](#), including vitamin and mineral supplements, and get the proper remedies if something is amiss.

"Here, especially in poor and rural counties, prenatal care is often infrequent, and only half of the women get adequate prenatal care. Some just go to the emergency room to have the baby – they never have any prenatal care."

Working with faculty at the University of Havana and the Cuban Institute of Nutrition and Hygiene, Neggers and Crowe are developing a proposal for further research.

Provided by University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa

Citation: Cuba's prenatal program improves low birth weights, study finds (2012, September 25) retrieved 13 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-09-cuba-prenatal-birth-weights.html>

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