

WIRF Beijing report

Research overview

Gestational (pregnancy) diabetes affects almost 10% of pregnancies here in Australia – but the condition is becoming much more common in China where the increasing prevalence is becoming a massive burden. This is partly related to the rapid urbanisation in China over the last 30 years leading to significant changes in lifestyle and a related rise in obesity and metabolic syndrome.

Our team here in Perth has been investigating the role of exercise for the prevention and management of gestational diabetes for the last 4 years. More recently, we have begun to share our expertise with collaborators at Peking University First Hospital in Beijing China. However, in traditional Chinese culture, pregnancy is considered a vulnerable period that requires rest and recuperation with many antenatal taboos, some of which discourage exercise in pregnancy due to concerns about safety for the mother and her unborn child. This suggests that understanding women's beliefs, attitudes, barriers and intentions towards exercise during pregnancy is a necessary first step to inform the design of effective exercise interventions for pregnant women in China.

Research highlights

We have recently completed a study comparing beliefs about exercise during pregnancy between Chinese and Australian women. We found that Australian women perceive more benefits to be gained from regular exercise during pregnancy and participate in more 'planned' exercise, whereas Chinese women have a more 'active' lifestyle in general during pregnancy, with much more daily walking. A lack of time was a significantly greater barrier to exercise in Australian women, while the Chinese women rated concerns about the safety of exercise as a greater barrier. These findings suggest that cultural sensitivity is necessary in designing effective exercise interventions for the pregnant woman.

Research achievements

Controlling the rising trend of obesity among Chinese women of childbearing age, together with preventing gestational diabetes is vital. Although exercise may be a promising strategy to assist in achieving this goal, altering women's attitudes and intentions towards exercise during pregnancy is a necessary first step. Our work in China is helping to spread the word about the potential benefits of exercise during pregnancy. As a result of our visits, Peking University First Hospital now has a dedicated 'exercise' room for their pregnant patients that are 'at risk' or diagnosed with gestational diabetes.

THE TEAM

Chief Investigators / Researchers

WIRF/School of Women's and Infants' Health, The University of Western Australia
Prof John Newnham AM FRANZCOG (Adjunct Professor,

Peking University First Hospital, Peking University, Beijing, China)
Dr Shaofu Li PhD

School of Sport Science, Exercise and Health, The University of Western Australia
Dr Kym Guelfi PhD

Peking University First Hospital, Peking University, Beijing, China
Prof Huixia Yang
Ms Wang Chen

Sponsor

Women and Infants Research Foundation