Restless Legs Syndrome in Pregnant Thai Women: Prevalence, Natural History, and Risk Factors

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Background: Restless legs syndrome (RLS) is a sleep-related neurological disorder that causes sleep disturbances and affects the quality of sleep. Pregnancy-related RLS has been proposed, but the natural history has not been well clarified.

Objective: This study aimed to identify the prevalence, natural history, and associated factors of RLS in pregnant Thai women.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was performed in 214 pregnant Thai women who attended Thammasat University Hospital’s delivery unit. The diagnosis of RLS was done according to the revised criteria of the International RLS Study Group (IRLSSG). General demographic data and antenatal care were reviewed. Epworth sleepiness scale (ESS), Pittsburgh sleep quality index (PSQI), and restless legs syndrome rating scale (RLSRS) were determined.

Results: A total of 24 pregnant women (11.2%) were diagnosed with RLS; 4.2% of those reported the symptoms in the first trimester, 25% in the second trimester, and 70.8% in the third trimester. Multivariate analysis revealed that anemia and previous history of RLS during pregnancy were associated with RLS (p < 0.01). Anemia was a risk of developing RLS during pregnancy (OR, 5.44; 95% CI, 2.02–14.65). Subjects with RLS significantly had higher ESS score (3.04 ± 1.49 vs 1.54 ± 1.33, p < 0.01) and PSQI: total trouble sleeping subscore than controls (10.54 ± 4.53 vs 8.61 ± 4.07, p =0.05). All subjects with RLS had severe symptom severity according to the RLSRS, and the symptoms subsided within a week after delivery. There was no immediate labor and newborn complications associated with RLS.

Conclusion: A high prevalence of RLS and its negative impacts on sleep can be confirmed in pregnant Thai women. Anemia and history of RLS are risk factors of RLS during pregnancy. Furthermore, RLS is commonly found and more pronounced in the second to third trimesters of pregnancy and it disappears within a few days after delivery.

Keywords: Restless legs syndrome, Pregnancy, Anemia, Sleep-related neurological disorder