WHO World Health Day 2025 - Healthy beginnings, hopeful futures

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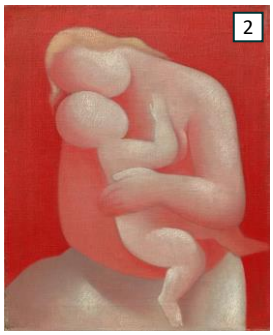
April 7th is **World Health Day**. The theme of this year's World Health Day is **'Healthy beginnings, hopeful futures'**, which focuses on **sharing of information to support healthy pregnancies**, births, and post-natal care. In keeping with this, we report on interesting new research by Hailu et al. (2025).[1]

Pregnancy is an exciting time; however, it is also a complex process in which complications may arise…



World Health Organization

"Women need **high-quality care** that supports them **physically and emotionally**, before, during and after birth. Health systems must evolve to manage the many health issues that impact maternal and newborn health." [3]

Common pregnancy-related complications include **hypertensive disorders of pregnancy** and **gestational diabetes**, which can cause long-term problems both for the mother and the baby. Hailu et al. investigate whether physical activity, including exercise, during pregnancy has an impact on the development of complications in pregnancy.

Physical activity during pregnancy and pregnancy related complication [1]

Objective

- To assess if the degree of physical activity during pregnancy has an impact on the development of **hypertensive disorder of pregnancy** and **gestational diabetes mellitus**

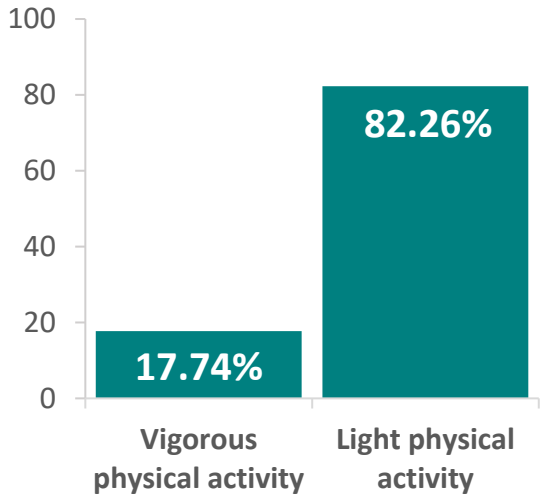
Methods

- Cross-sectional study of 150 Ethiopian women who gave birth during the study period. Level of physical activity recorded using the validated Pregnancy Physical Activity Questionnaire.
- 65 participated in **vigorous physical activity**
- 85 participated in **light physical activity**
- The rate of hypertensive disorders and gestational diabetes was reported

Results

- ✓ 62/150 (41.3%) women overall had a pregnancy-related complication
- ✓ Women who engaged in **vigorous** physical activity had a significantly lower proportion of complications (17.74%) compared to those who engaged in **light** physical activity (82.26%) (p = 0.001).

Rate of complications in pregnant women according to level of physical activity undertaken



Our thoughts:

- This study benefits from use of a **validated** patient questionnaire, and functions as a good starting point for further research into physical activity during pregnancy.
- However, it is **limited** in that it does not explore causation: women may have undertaken lighter physical activity *because* they had complications relating to pregnancy.
- There were **strong associations** between the place of residence, educational status, occupation, and the rate of complications. It is also likely that the level of activity undertaken prior to pregnancy may have an effect.
- Overall, this study concludes that the level of physical activity during pregnancy might predict the development of gestational diabetes and hypertension, however its effect is **confounded** by other factors that should be considered.
- **Further research** should be undertaken on a more diverse population, considering multiple timepoints throughout pregnancy, to fully understand the impact of physical activity and enable women to make the healthiest decisions for themselves and their babies.

References

1. Hailu, M., Amare Tesfa, N., Nigatu, A. *et al.* Physical activity during pregnancy and pregnancy related complication. *Sci Rep* **15**, 8980 (2025). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-94492-2
2. Mother Galanda by Mikuláš Galanda (Public Domain work of art, photographic reproduction, Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mikul%C3%A1%C5%A1_Galanda_-_Mother_Galanda.jpg)
3. WHO – World Health Day 2025. https://www.who.int/campaigns/world-health-day/2025