
Red alert on environmental toxins: Citizens, beware

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In 2008 we published in the 'Reproductive Health Magazine' a review of the health hazards in our environment which negatively affect the fertility of both men and women. The intention was to warn them so that they can protect themselves from environmental toxins which abound in our country.

We published a more detailed and scientific review of these reproductive hazards in 2009 in the 'African Journal of Reproductive Medicine'. The main emphasis of the review is for us to be up to date on the consequences of such toxins and how to avoid them and how to prevent their negative health impact.

Last month, it was gratifying to note that The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists published a committee opinion in the 'Fertility and Sterility Journal'. The highlight of their opinion is indeed a unique overview of the imminent dangers of environmental toxins.

In the journal they state, "Reducing exposure to toxic environmental agents is a critical area of intervention for obstetricians, gynaecologists, and other reproductive health care professionals. Patient exposure to toxic environmental chemicals and other stressors is ubiquitous, and preconception and prenatal exposure to toxic environmental agents can have a profound and lasting effect on reproductive health across the life course.

"Prenatal exposure to certain chemicals has been documented to increase the risk of cancer in childhood; adult male exposure to pesticides is linked to altered semen quality, sterility, and prostate cancer; and postnatal exposure to some pesticides can interfere with all developmental stages of reproductive function

in adult females, including puberty, menstruation and ovulation, fertility and fecundity, and menopause. Many environmental factors harmful to reproductive health disproportionately affect vulnerable and underserved populations, which leaves some populations, including underserved women, more vulnerable to adverse reproductive health effects than other populations.

“The recent use of plastic ware has further increased the prevalence of such toxins indoor. The evidence that links exposure to toxic environmental agents and adverse reproductive and developmental health outcomes is sufficiently robust, and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the American Society for Reproductive Medicine join leading scientists and other clinical practitioners in calling for timely action to identify and reduce exposure to toxic environmental agents while addressing the consequences of such exposure.”

Simply put, there are toxins in our environment that can affect our abilities to have babies, disrupt the fertility potential of our yet unborn babies, and cause cancer of several organs like breast, prostate, colon, and others. When combined with toxins in our food the consequences are ominous.

The report gave the statistics for United State of America by stating that exposure to environmental chemicals and metals in air, water, soil, food, and consumer products is wide spread. An analysis of National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data from 2003-2004 found that virtually every pregnant woman in the United States is exposed to at least 43 different chemicals. Chemicals in pregnant women can cross the placenta, and in some cases, such as with methyl mercury, can accumulate in the fetus, resulting in higher fetal exposure than maternal exposure. Prenatal exposure to environmental chemicals is linked to various adverse health consequences, and patient exposure at any point in time can lead to harmful reproductive health outcomes.

If we extrapolate that statistics to Nigeria where our environment is subjected to more insults like oil pollution, diesel fumes, automobile exhaust, kerosene fumes, telephone mast radiations, lagoon and sea pollution, toxic waste deposits, industrial pollution, unregulated farming, low environmental protection regulation, and many other forms of environmental contamination, then one can appreciate the fact that the severity is more in our nation.

Since 2012 when Martlife detox clinic, a Modern Mayr medicine centre was established in Lagos our Asyra, test which determines the level of environmental toxins in tested individuals showed that almost 85% of over 520 guests who have come for analysis and detoxification had heavy metals and other toxins such as mercury, lead, arsenic, aviation fuel, kerosene, diesel fumes, oil fumes, radiation and electromagnetic levels to mention but a few toxins.

In my opinion the solution to this health disaster should follow the following process. The first is a prevention plan where the vulnerable population must be given adequate information and education on the variety of outdoor air pollution, indoor pollutants, including leads, allergens such as dust mite, chemical pollutions, radiation and other forms of environmental waste. The next form of pollution is from ingested food especially fresh fruits, vegetables, unprocessed foods and some large fish. Other contaminants are petrochemicals, polyethylene and polyvinyl carbons, paint fumes and several others. Several health professionals should join hands to educate the people through various media available.

The second is guidance to the population to avoid toxic substances at home – like ensuring careful use of insecticides, avoiding kerosene fumes or placing generator fumes close to living areas. Both pregnant women and those aspiring to get pregnant should avoid some large fish like swordfish, stock fish, king mackerel and others that are known to contain high levels of methylmercury.