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**KNOWLEDGE OF FOLIC ACID FOR PREVENTION OF NEURAL TUBE DEFECTS IN  
COMMUNITY WITH HIGH PREVALENCE OF CONSANGUINEOUS MARRIAGES**

**L.A. Jaber<sup>1</sup>, P. Merlob<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>Department of Pediatrics <sup>2</sup>Department of Neonatology, Schneider Children's  
Medical Center of Israel, Petah Tikva, Israel  
[jabe@bezeqint.net](mailto:jabe@bezeqint.net)*

Background: Neural tube defects (NTD) are severe congenital malformations and can be fatal. Intake of 0.4 mg folic acid in the periconceptual period reduces the risk of NTD by 50-70%. Consanguinity in the Arab population in Israel is a prevalent custom.

Methods: The aim of this study is to assess the level of awareness regarding folic acid and its effect in the prevention of NTD among Arab-Israeli women of childbearing age. We therefore conducted a cross-sectional study. Out of 653 women (18-45 year) who were randomly selected for interview while visiting their family physician or well-baby clinic, 624 were completely interviewed. Fifty-four percent (n = 333) of the respondents had heard about folic acid; 14% (n = 89) were familiar with the protective effect of NTD and 3% (n = 18) used folic acid in the first months of pregnancy while none of them used it before pregnancy.

Results: Higher educated women, women who had one or 2 children, paramedics, and women of high socioeconomic status all knew more about the protective effect of folic acid (p<0.001). Age and religion have no significant effect.

Conclusions: There is much need to improve the awareness of this population to the protective effect of folic acid and fortification of food and supplementation and should be considered the best way to improve the balance of folic acid in women of childbearing age.

