

WEIGHT EXPECTATIONS:

EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF OVERWEIGHT AND OBESE PREGNANT WOMEN AND THEIR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

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STUDY OBJECTIVES

- What do we know about the psychological & emotional implications of overweight & obesity in pregnancy?
- How does the social context of women's lives affect their experiences of overweight & obesity throughout pregnancy?
- How do healthcare providers support women & what are their ideas to improve the system for women?

METHODS

- Interviewed 33 individuals: 18 women; 15 health care providers (family doctors, nurses, ob/gyns, midwives, dieticians)
- Joint study between ACEWH & PWHCE
- Co-researcher - Jennifer Bernier (ACEWH)
- 2010-2012 (First year in N.S. included women only; second year expanded to rural N.S. All women & hcp were from Saskatoon HR)
- Face-to-face interviews and phone interviews
- Audio podcast (summer 2012)

PHYSICAL HEALTH & PREGNANCY/ BIRTH OUTCOMES

- Literature indicates morbidities & co-morbidities associated with obesity for mothers (i.e. gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, cesarean birth, postoperative infection, hypertension, blood clots)
- Also for babies (i.e. stillbirth, macrosomia, neural tube defect, incidences from cesarean)
- Pregnancy outcome deteriorates in linear manner as BMI increases

PERCEPTION OF PREGNANT WOMEN WITH OBESITY ?

The Globe and Mail - "Canadian doctors are considering a policy that would bar obese women from trying to have babies through fertility treatments – provoking debate over whether the fat have the same reproductive rights as the thin."
(Sept 20, 2011)



CAREGIVERS IN STUDY: COMPETITION, STIGMA & ETHICAL PRACTICE

- The different orientations to maternity care in Canada has been historical & political (i.e. midwifery care vs. physician)
- Stigma of obesity & overweight are pervasive
- Maternity care providers of all scopes of practice are both ethically & professionally obligated to provide best care possible



SELF-PERCEPTION & IMAGE

" I was very good during my pregnancy because I was taking care of somebody else. But once the baby was born, I wasn't so good at taking care of myself. So my nutrition wasn't probably as attentive as when I was pregnant."

(SK woman)

"You see those pictures, beautiful pictures of pregnant women who are naked & covered up just so...I guess the biggest thing about weight and pregnancy was I missed the aesthetics of looking cute & pregnant. I know that sounds horribly selfish & shallow but [it's] the biggest thing that has affected my mood or feelings during the pregnancy"

(NS woman)

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES WITH CAREGIVERS

- ◉ 18 women interviewed: 11 described experiences as either neutral or positive (although all have some negative experiences)
- ◉ Instances of uncertainty with caregiver - how to talk about weight?
- ◉ Subtleties of comments or actions towards stigmatizing behaviour

WOMEN'S EMOTIONAL RESPONSES DURING PREGNANCY

Two over-riding emotions in interviews:

- self-blame/guilt
- fear of judgment



CALL FOR ACTION

- ◉ Team approach to maternity care for women with overweight/obesity (intercollaborative practice)
- ◉ Information on weight gain & risk needs to be more systematically shared among all women, so as not to stigmatize
- ◉ An understanding of risk among women with obesity should be tempered with other factors (age, pre-existing conditions, genetics)
- ◉ Many obese women have negative experiences within health care, so sensitivity important

"I think it is hard for women who are overweight and obese to really love their bodies. It's rare. But you know, we can kind of stretch that concept a little bit. And again, going through the process of giving birth often helps women to have this more profound respect for what their bodies are capable of and how miraculous the whole process is. And again, helping them feel like they are doing it. They have accomplished this great feat."

- N.S. caregiver, 2012

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