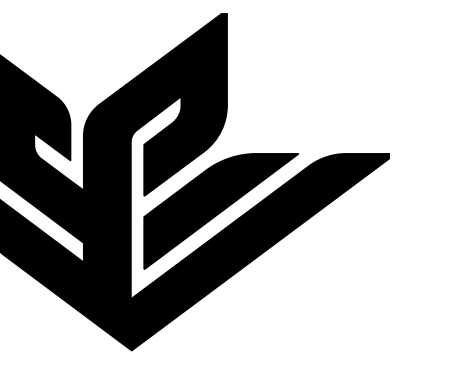


Measuring body image during pregnancy’s impact on the level of postpartum depression



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ABSTRACT

It is well known that women experience many changes within their bodies during the perinatal period, and that postpartum depression is the most common mental illness following childbirth due to the many chemical, behavioral, and psychological changes that occur in women’s bodies. “Literature reporting body image disturbances across the perinatal period has produced inconsistent findings, owing to the complexity of body image experiences during pregnancy and the first year postpartum” (2015, Watson et al.). Body image issues during the perinatal period are common, although “more research based on measures suitable to cover the special features of body image during pregnancy is necessary to improve our knowledge about the nature, course and possible adaptation mechanisms of body image during pregnancy” (2019, Nagl et al.). This study would provide more evidence specific to the impact of body image issues during pregnancy and measure if there is an association with postpartum depression.

METHODS

Participants:

70 women who are pregnant between the ages of 21-40 years old

This sample will be taken from women who live in King County and only women who complete a full-term pregnancy will continue to be evaluated postpartum. It will be ensured that these participants are within the 21-40 age range and have not previously been treated for an eating disorder.

Procedure:

Participants will receive BIPS (Body Image in Pregnancy Scale) in their last trimester of pregnancy, which will measure each woman’s body image quantitatively. They will then be invited to take the EPDS (Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale) every three months postpartum for nine months after birth. Participants will be able to complete these scales on a virtual platform.

RESULTS

RQ: Does body image during pregnancy affect the level of postpartum depression?

A linear regression model will be used in order to examine if body image during pregnancy does well to predict the level of postpartum depression.

Sampling Procedure:

Participants of this study will be recruited from the Swedish Center for Perinatal Bonding and Support at Swedish Hospital in King County. Researchers will also ask for participants to disclose their ethnic-racial identities as well as socio-economic status in order to evaluate whether the results were gathered come from a diverse population.

INTRODUCTION

- Since the beginning of time women have been the ones to hold both the physical and emotional weight of procreation
- Due to the many harmful socially constructed messages about what a woman’s body “should” look like, there are also expectations for a woman’s body to be thin, slender, and without any wrinkles, rolls, or body fat
- Pregnancy holds the most wild and miraculous changes of the human body while growing another human body inside one’s own
- These many changes have a significant impact on the way the women view their own bodies
- There are many layers attributing to women’s body image during pregnancy including hormonal shifts and societal pressure, which could affect postpartum mental health
- The mind and body are completely interconnected and therefore women in the perinatal period must be considered holistically through a biopsychosocial-spiritual lens in order to see an embodied picture of women’s postpartum mental health affected by body image during pregnancy

MEASURES

Body image will be measured using BIPS, which consists of 36 items to be answered on a 5-point response scale. Scale reference points differ depending on the aspect of body image measured (e.g. body image dissatisfaction, body image importance). The items cover seven factors: ‘preoccupation with physical appearance’ (six items), ‘dissatisfaction with facial features’ (four items), ‘sexual attractiveness’ (six items), ‘prioritizing appearance over body functioning’ (five items), ‘appearance-related behavioral avoidance’ (three items), and ‘dissatisfaction with body parts’ (six items). The scores of each subscale will be combined to create a sum score, with higher scores indicating greater body image disturbance.

Depression will be measured using the EPDS, which evaluates with a sum score range of 0 to 30 with higher scores indicating a higher severity of depressive symptomatology. This will be given periodically every three months for nine months postpartum and then added in order to assess for an average sum score for each participant.

These two instruments will then be statistically examined using the Regression analysis, which will measure the statistical relationship, or association between, body image of pregnant women and postpartum depression.

Discussion

Social Implications: If my hypothesis is correct that the more body image issues during pregnancy will contribute to a greater level of postpartum depression for women, this research would help bring to the light the nuances of body image specific to pregnancy rather than just overall body image dissatisfaction for women. I believe it would also normalize the experience of body image issues during pregnancy and postpartum depression for women during the perinatal period while bringing awareness to those who have never been pregnant.

Clinical Implications: The greatest clinical implication would be the importance of assessing women’s body image during pregnancy in order to reduce the severity of postpartum depression for women. This would also portray the need for clinicians who are working with women in the perinatal period to have training in order to assess and treat body image during pregnancy and postpartum depression with this specific population.

Future Research: Depending on the demographics of my sample size, there may be a need for further research for a more diverse population as well as further research to investigate how demographic variables might influence body image during pregnancy and postpartum depression. It also cannot be ruled out that self-selection of study participants may lead to an overrepresentation of women with body image concerns in this sample, therefore, future research may examine ways to create a more randomized sample size. Future research may also consider focusing on prospective studies including several assessment points throughout the perinatal period.

PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

Research Question: Does body image during pregnancy affect the level of postpartum depression?

Hypothesis: The more body image issues during pregnancy will contribute to a greater level of postpartum depression for women.