



## BODY IMAGE CONCERNS AND SELF-ESTEEM DURING PREGNANCY

### Medical Science

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Pregnancy although a physiological process causes considerable physical and emotional changes. The body image concern is an inner experience of the outer appearance of the individual and may have an impact on self esteem of an individual during this vulnerable period.

**Aim:** To assess body image concerns during pregnancy, assess self esteem during pregnancy and also correlate the body image concerns with self-esteem during pregnancy.

**Materials and methods:** A quantitative descriptive research approach was used to conduct the study. The sample size was 120 pregnant women. Purposive sampling was used for data collection. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Self-Structured Likert scale was used to assess self-esteem, and body image concerns respectively.

**Results:** Percentage distribution of body image concerns among pregnant women according to the concerns showed that 25% percentage had positive while 75% had negative concerns. 8.3% had low self esteem on Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Self-esteem and body image concerns had low positive relationship & it was statistically significant ( $p < 0.024$ ).

**Conclusion:** On the basis of present study findings, we conclude that health professionals should create awareness among pregnant women about the changes occurring in pregnancy to change the body image concerns and hence not affect their self esteem.

### KEYWORDS

Body image concern, Pregnancy, Self-esteem

### INTRODUCTION:

Pregnancy is a critical period in a woman's life, since it is considered to be a state of transformations having a profound effect on the life of the future mother.<sup>1</sup> It is a phase when complex physiological and psychological changes take place in a short space of time<sup>2,3</sup> which affect both the mental and physical health of the mother and also influences the health of her baby.<sup>4,5</sup>

Pregnancy is an important time in the life of a woman as her body undergoes immense transformation. During pregnancy women's dissatisfaction with their bodies increases irrespective of how satisfied they were prior to the pregnancy. Evidence suggests that pregnant women who are affected negatively by changes to their body are less likely to initiate breastfeeding.<sup>6</sup> Dissatisfaction during pregnancy might lead to unhealthy eating behaviours and weight loss, which might have direct adverse impact on the health of the mother and baby. These women have the tendency to compare their bodies and have public self-consciousness, the tendency to be conscious of whether one is being judged by others when in public. Pregnancy causes physical changes to the body, especially in the breasts and stomach and stretch marks, acne, skin pigmentation and varicose veins can also develop. This physical transformation, the internal psychological stress and the external pressure of staying fit make women feel unattractive and depressed.<sup>7</sup>

The negative evaluation of body size, shape and weight in obese and overweight women during pregnancy and postpartum leads to low self-esteem.<sup>8</sup> Self-esteem is defined as a perception of individual lifestyle as well as the value attached by the community to the individual owing to his/her past experiences. Individuals with high self-esteem are more creative, successful, healthy, self-confident, assertive and capable of expressing ideas easily and they are largely seen as socially compatible people.<sup>9</sup> During pregnancy, self-esteem level may decline as women find themselves feeling fat and less attractive.<sup>10</sup>

Among women, body image perception changes at different stages of

life such as puberty, pregnancy and menopause due to structural, functional, hormonal and alterations in the appearance.<sup>11</sup> Changes occurring in the bodies of women during pregnancy may lead to the feeling of bulkiness, clumsiness, ugliness, and unattractiveness. As a result of these changes, self-confidence, self-esteem and body image perception of women may decline and may be adversely affected.<sup>12</sup>

Body image dissatisfaction during pregnancy not only has a negative impact on mother but baby. It is linked to unhealthy eating; dieting and purging behaviours.<sup>13</sup> In turn these behaviours increase the risk of low infant birth weight and premature delivery<sup>14</sup> with higher levels of miscarriage and caesarean delivery<sup>15</sup> amongst pregnant women with disordered eating. Conversely, poor body image sometimes associated with increased weight gain as the woman binges or comfort eats,<sup>16</sup> a factor that has been associated with infant macrosomia, caesarean section and later childhood overweight.<sup>17</sup>

Media, the fashion industry and the clothing industry have direct effects on body image and might cause distress to the female sex. Research suggests that the changing body size and shape of women over the past decade has been portrayed negatively in leading magazines. Bust and hip measurements have decreased and the body weight shown in magazines is 13-19% lower than a healthy weight. Such unattainable standards of appearance set by media make women feel worse about their body.<sup>8</sup>

Body dissatisfaction is part of an attitudinal component of body image and refers to a negative evaluation of one's own body.<sup>18</sup> In the case of pregnant women, a poor body image is often linked to an inadequate or restrictive diet<sup>19</sup> and to pre and post-partum depression,<sup>20</sup> which can have serious negative consequences both for the health and well-being of the mother as well as for the fetus.<sup>21</sup>

### MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The present study was conducted in Indira Gandhi Institute of Medical Sciences, Patna and Danapur Sub-Divisional Hospital, Danapur on 120 pregnant women visiting as outpatients during the year 2018. The

study had the approval of the Ethics Committee of the institute. This was a hospital based study with a cross sectional design, quantitative descriptive research approach, non-experimental research design and purposive sampling technique was used.

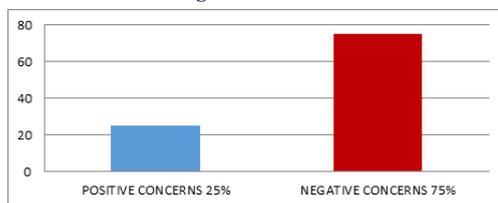
Objectives of the study were to assess body image concerns during pregnancy, to measure self esteem during pregnancy and to correlate the body image concerns with self-esteem during pregnancy. Assumption for the study was that the perception of body image affects self-esteem and self-esteem itself varies the perception of an individual. Outpatients pregnant females with age >18 years visiting IGIMS and Danapur sub-divisional hospital giving informed written consent were included in the study. Pregnant women suffering from AIDS/HIV, Hepatitis and STD or those with an unsound mind, mental retardation were excluded from the study. The subjects were assessed on a semi-structured socio-demographic datasheet like age, education, family type, number of family income, family income monthly, occupation, trimester, working hour per day, duration of marriage religion etc. specially developed for the study. Purposive sampling was used for data collection. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and Self-Structured Likert scale was used to assess self-esteem, and body image concerns respectively. A pilot study was conducted on 1/10 subjects to find out reliability of the tool and feasibility of the study. Content validity was determined by experts opinion on the relevance of items. Reliability of tools were computed by split half method using Karl Pearson's coefficient of correlation & Spearman Brown's Prophecy formula. Self-esteem scale and Self Structured Body Image Concerns was .88 and .70 respectively

Statistical analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 22. The level of significance was kept at .05. Group differences for the continuous and categorical variables were computed using independent t test and Chi-square test respectively. Clinical characteristics of the patient group were determined using descriptive statistics. Analysis and interpretation of data was done according to objectives of the study by using descriptive and inferential statistics.

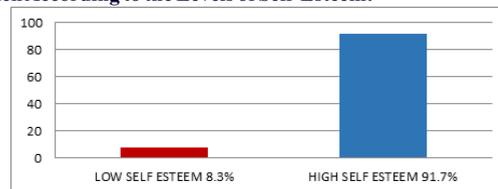
**RESULTS:**

Percentage distribution of body image concerns among pregnant women according to the concerns showed that 25% percentage had positive while 75% had negative concerns. 8.3% had low self esteem on Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Self-esteem and body image concerns had low positive relationship & it was statistically significant (p<0. 024).

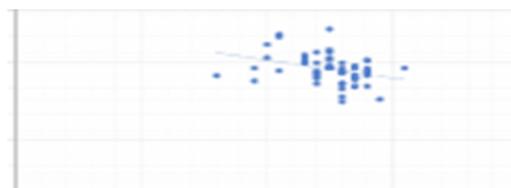
**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Body Image Concerns Among Pregnant Women According to the Concerns:**



**Table 2: Percentage Distribution Self-Esteem Among Pregnant Women According to the Levels of Self-Esteem:**



**Table 3: Correlation Between Body Image Concerns & Self-Esteem Among Pregnant Women:**



Self-esteem  
Linear line (Body Image Concerns)

Self-esteem and body image concerns had low positive relationship and it was statistically significant (p<0. 024).

**DISCUSSION:**

Body image concern is a dynamic concept which changes at different stages of life such as puberty, pregnancy and menopause due to hormonal, functional and structural alterations in the appearance.10 Changes occurring in women during pregnancy may lead to the feeling of ugliness, bulkiness and unattractiveness. As a result of these changes, self-esteem of women may be affected adversely and hence decline. In our study, most of the pregnant women had negative concerns regarding body image during their pregnancy, though significant among them had high self esteem. But on co-relation analysis we found that they had low positive co-relations among them. As it is known, the alterations observed in the body during pregnancy are mostly addressed in respect to the weight gain during pregnancy, women express their concerns and describe themselves as less attractive compared to the non-pregnancy state which has an impact on their self confidence. Also, women may have low self-esteem since they perceive their bodies as obese and have negative concerns like skin being rough, weight gain, shape of the body, acne on face, buttocks, breast and thigh being bulkier and less attractive during pregnancy.21 Psychological and physiological change in the body of the pregnant leads to stress.

Changes in self-esteem levels in pregnancy may be impacted by several factors such as the level of education, maternal age, number of previous births, duration of marriage, the income level of the family, planned or unplanned pregnancy and also the way they perceive their bodily changes during pregnancy.4 In our study, the pregnant women with similar demographic, social and medical characteristics were compared in terms of self-esteem and its relationship with body image concerns. It is important to know this relationship as it has a significant impact on pregnancy state and its outcome which is of utmost importance in the lives of women. Though, there is a need for a more comprehensive study looking into all the factors affecting self esteem of pregnant women.

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