Prevalence and Psychosocial Correlates of Disordered Eating Among Chinese Pregnant Women in Hong Kong

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Three-hundred-and-fifty-nine Chinese pregnant women were surveyed to determine prevalence and psychosocial correlates of eating disturbance in pregnancy. About 9.8% of participants reported disordered eating symptoms. Prevalence of these symptoms was related to general factors of drive for thinness, body image dissatisfaction, and traditional gender role attitudes. These general factors were, in turn, associated with factors specific to pregnant women. In particular, drive for thinness was related to poor spousal support; body image dissatisfaction was related to poor maternal-fetal attachment; and traditional gender role attitudes were related to strong maternal-fetal attachment and spousal support. Limitations and implications of these findings are discussed.

Pregnancy is a period during which a woman undergoes profound physical, psychological, and cognitive changes. Previous suppressed personal issues, conflicts about role alteration, frustration about changes in body shape, and concerns about psychological separation frequently surface in pregnancy (Bailey & Hailey, 1987; Budd, 1987; Leifer, 1977; Richardson, 1990). The transition to parenthood is thus a time of great stress, and can precipitate or exacerbate eating disturbance in pregnant women (Benton-Hardy & Lock, 1998; Davis & Wardle, 1994; Franko & Walton, 1993; James, 2001; Johnson, 1991). In a review of the limited studies examining disordered eating among married patients, Van den Broucke and Vandereycken (1988, 1989) found that disordered eating symptoms are triggered by pregnancy or childbirth in