A Longitudinal Study Investigating Disordered Eating during the Transition to Motherhood among Chinese Women in Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The current longitudinal study explored the prevalence and psychosocial factors of disordered eating among new Chinese mothers in Hong Kong.

Method: Self-report questionnaires on bulimic symptoms and pregnancy-related factors were collected at both prenatal and postnatal periods from 131 Chinese women.

Results: Participants reported significantly more severe disordered eating in the postnatal than in the prenatal period, with percentages being 19.08% and 8.4%, respectively, using the Eating Disorder Inventory-2. Results revealed that prenatal disordered eating, weak maternal-fetal attachment, a low level of instrumental spousal support during pregnancy, postnatal depressive symptoms, and a poor mother-infant relationship were significantly related to disordered eating at 6 months postchildbirth.

Conclusion: Findings suggested that the transition to motherhood is a period of stress that may either precipitate or exacerbate disordered eating.

Keywords: disordered eating; Chinese mothers; Hong Kong

Introduction

The transition to motherhood is an important stage in a woman's life during which profound changes and adjustment in self-identity, interpersonal relationships, and responsibilities are experienced. It is a time of stress that either precipitates or exacerbates problematic eating behaviors.1–5 Although there is an accumulation of evidence indicating the negative impact of disordered eating during pregnancy on maternal and fetal health,6–8 relatively few studies have examined how eating disturbances change during women's transition from pregnancy to motherhood. We aimed to fill in this knowledge gap by investigating the prevalence of disordered eating during pregnancy as well as during the postnatal period among Chinese women.

We also used the longitudinal data to determine psychosocial factors underlying postnatal disordered eating.

Disordered Eating and Transition to Motherhood

Compared with the literature on disordered eating in adolescent girls, relatively less research has been conducted on women throughout the course of pregnancy and the postnatal period. Researchers have noted that the onset of pregnancy tends to either trigger or worsen disordered eating.1–5 Although there is an accumulation of evidence indicating the negative impact of disordered eating during pregnancy on maternal and fetal health,6–8 relatively few studies have examined how eating disturbances change during women's transition from pregnancy to motherhood. We aimed to fill in this knowledge gap by investigating the prevalence of disordered eating during pregnancy as well as during the postnatal period among Chinese women.

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