

Women's understanding of managing gestational weight gain during pregnancy in the UK: A thematic synthesis

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Background

- ❖ Weight gain is an expected aspect of pregnancy, however, pregnancy is also a time where women are at risk of gaining excess weight
- ❖ Regardless of pregnancy start weight, excessive gestational weight gain is associated with health implications and long term weight retention

Methods

- ❖ Electronic searches were carried out on CINAHL, MEDLINE, MIDIRS and PsycInfo for UK papers published 1992–2017
- ❖ Screening the 1182 hits using pre-defined eligibility criteria identified 17 articles for inclusion
- ❖ Study findings were inductively synthesised using thematic synthesis¹; synthesis is ongoing

Aim

- To collate and synthesise qualitative literature on women's experiences of gestational weight management and associated health behaviours (including diet and physical activity) in the UK

Findings

Gaining weight during pregnancy

Theme 1. Women's interpretation of weight gain in pregnancy

- Women hoped to gain weight that would be perceived as attributed to the pregnancy only, for example their bump
- Weight gain on other areas of the body, such as arms and legs were perceived to be 'excessive' and as a result of poor diet and inactivity

"Now because I only have a short time to go, I look at the scales and it's a big achievement, and that's brilliant, as what I have gained has been sufficient for the baby, but not to put on myself if you like, so I'm actually quite proud of myself"²

Theme 2. Obesity overshadows gestational weight gain

- Women who started their pregnancy with a raised BMI felt their BMI was used by others as a proxy for their health
- Although women with a raised BMI appreciated the importance of being healthy during their pregnancy, they distanced their weight status from being an indicator of their health

"I felt again like I was being penalised because I was fat. I used to say, 'oh, I've got to do the fat girls' test again, have I?' All the time, I felt like they were picking on you because you were fat"³

"I'm still as healthy as anybody else that's pregnant. I'm just carrying a bit more weight. That's how I perceive it as"⁴

Eating for two; exercising for one

Theme 3. A mother doing the best for her unborn baby

- The women's priority was to provide the ideal environment for their baby to develop, mainly through nutrition and reducing unnecessary risk, which they often linked to physical activity
- Women acknowledged that changes made to diet and physical activity levels may be associated with weight management, but that their motivations were primarily the health of the unborn baby

"To do like what was best for the baby kind of thing, make sure I was doing the right things for the baby's growth and the baby's health, that I wasn't hurting him in anyway kind of thing. And giving him the best start"⁵

"I would like to think that I have done everything possible to make sure that the baby is healthy and when it is born, has a healthy weight and is not being deprived of anything"²

Theme 4. The perceived roles of diet and physical activity

- Women perceived a direct link between their dietary consumption and the development of the unborn baby, heightening the need for a healthy diet
- Physical activity was perceived as mainly beneficial for the woman only, and risky for the health of the baby

"Obviously anything you're taking in can sort of make its way to the baby and will have an effect on the growth of baby and things like that."⁶

"I've seen pregnant people there and they're on the treadmill and I think 'cool yourself'... you've got your baby bouncing up and down and then you've got your fat on top of the baby and it's just, you know, you could give them brain damage"⁷

Conclusions

- ❖ Views towards weight management and its associated health behaviours are complex, with diet and physical activity perceived as having different roles in the context of pregnancy
- ❖ Women hold lay beliefs toward the impact of diet and physical activity on the health of their pregnancy, there is an opportunity to work with unhelpful beliefs through the development of tailored interventions
- ❖ Most qualitative research investigating weight during pregnancy is conducted through cross-sectional interviews, and focuses on women who begin their pregnancy with a raised BMI. More research is needed to explore the views of women with differing BMIs and taking a longitudinal approach

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