



MOTHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON PREGNANCY AND LIFESTYLE CHANGES

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Aim

To explore views regarding pregnancy and postpartum weight management among mothers of high birth weight infants (>4kg)

Rationale

- High birth weight (macrosomia) is associated with an increase in adverse maternal and fetal outcomes (Baird et al. 2005)
- Excessive weight gain during pregnancy and high pre-pregnancy BMI are primary risk factors for high infant birth weight
- Provide an insight into weight management advice for pregnant and postpartum women

Methods

Participants: Purposive sample of 21 women, who varied in terms of initial pregnancy BMI were recruited from the control arm of a randomised trial in the Nationality Maternity Hospital

Design: Two semi-structured interviews conducted with second-time mothers whose first infant was macrosomic:

- Interviewed at 6 and 12 months after their second pregnancy
- Experiences in both pregnancies explored

Methods

Setting: Interviews were conducted in the women's homes with children or partner sometimes present

Qualitative approach: subtle realism (Hammersley, 1992; Kirk & Miller, 1986). A qualitative approach is especially appropriate for exploring topics about which little is known and where the subject matter is sensitive (Jansen & Rae Davis 1998).

Interview guide: Perceptions and experiences regarding lifestyle habits, weight management and wellbeing at three time periods: 1) during pregnancy 2) postpartum and 3) before having children

Data Analysis

Data analysis: inductive form of thematic analysis
(Braun and Clarke, 2006)

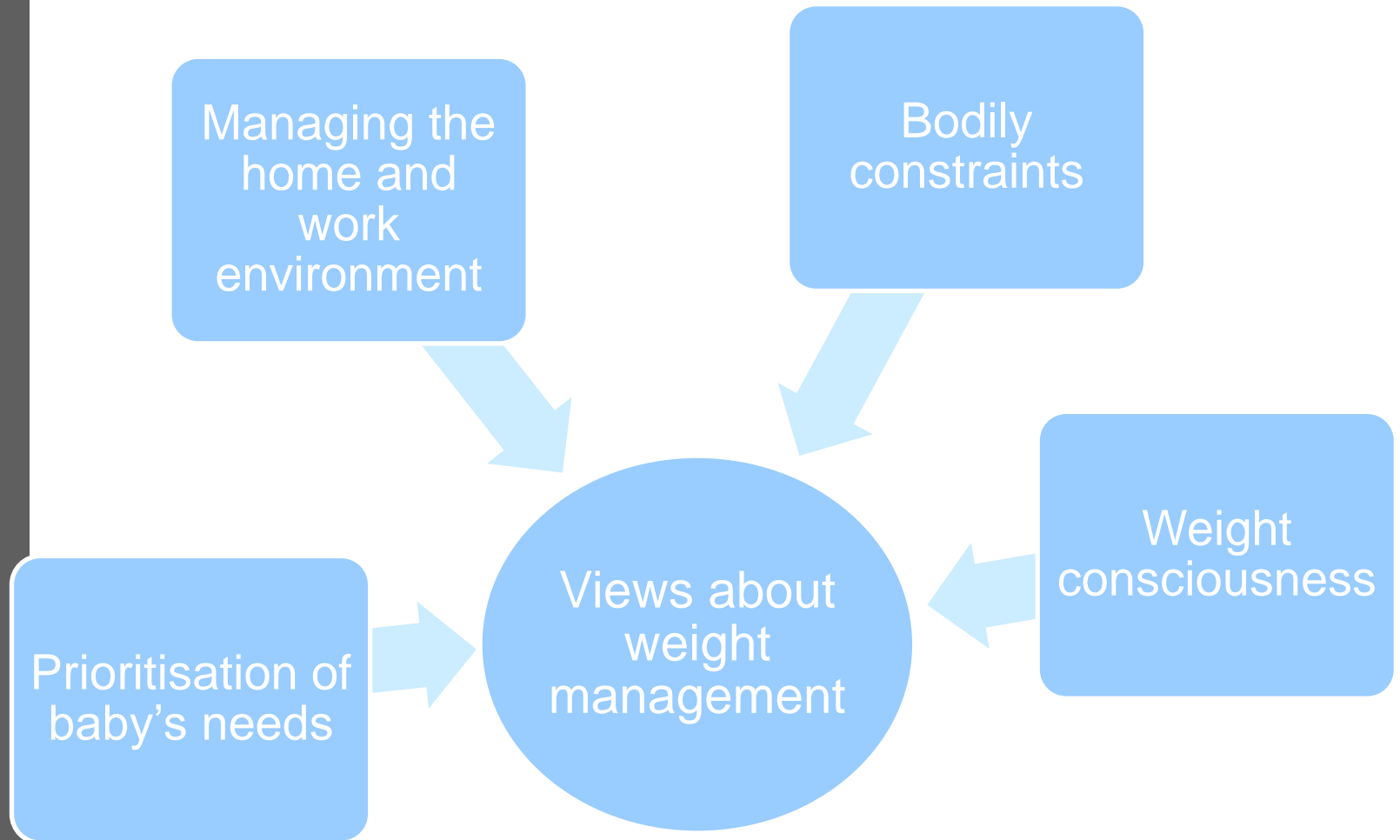
Trustworthiness: Lincoln & Guba (1985)

- Impressions from first interview were discussed with participants at the end of the second interview
- Regular meeting with a second researcher to challenge and /or validate the data coding, development of themes and interpretation of findings

Sample characteristics

Characteristic		n	Characteristic	n
Age range			Current smoker	
	20-29	5	Yes	6
	30-45	16	No	15
Relationship status			BMI at first antenatal visit	
	Married/cohabiting	21	Normal weight	10
	Single	0	Overweight	7
Mother's employment status			Obese	4
	Full-time employment	15	Mother's education level	
	Part-time employment	4	Third level degree	8
	Unemployed	0	Third level cert/ diploma	9
	Looking after home and family	2	Completed secondary	4

Findings



Prioritisation of baby's needs

Following calls of body during pregnancy led to 'eating for two', whilst others followed cravings in 'moderation':

I didn't particularly watch what I ate during my pregnancy, I kind of just ate what I wanted, when I wanted, you know, and I suppose naively you feel it's a chance to or a time to indulge yourself rightly or wrongly (Cliona)

I don't think that you have to double your intake, or anything like that. Like I was saying, I would always allow myself little treats and you know and I would be conscious of maybe upping my calories by 200/300 a day or something you know but just eating lots of healthy stuff and as I normally would (Niamh).

Prioritisation of baby's needs

The risks or rewards of physical activity in pregnancy:

I used to go to the gym two or three times a week before I had Ruth (first child) and then when I had Ruth I didn't want to run, I didn't want to use the weights, I didn't want to do anything that I'd done before because I just didn't want to hurt her (Celia)

Yes, more movement is much, much better. Some women think it is better to stay at home, sit on the chair, watch TV- that is good for the baby. It is not, I think movement is healthier (Caroline)

Prioritisation of baby's needs

Prioritisation of baby's needs postpartum was a barrier to a healthy lifestyle for some and facilitator for others:

I just think that after having a baby you're so focused on them that sometimes you kind of forget about yourself and you're probably eating the wrong things that maybe you would never have had before, because it's just, it's quick, you can just throw it in the microwave (Miriam)

You don't treat your body right until you're, well I didn't anyway until I knew I had somebody else that was kind of relying on it, do you know? (Laura)

Managing the home and work environment

Lack of time and tiredness after work and from looking after children contributed to unhealthy eating habits and a sedentary lifestyle during pregnancy and postpartum:

you're home with baby when the baby is very small and you're tired and you tend to snack a lot (Lorraine)

Food was often used by the mothers as a means of overcoming tiredness by boosting waning energy levels.

Managing the home and work environment

Motivation was perceived to enable postpartum weight loss, but this was heavily influenced by support from others:

I think some kind of company if you have somebody else in a similar situation then that's definitely helpful, so if you have someone who's on maternity leave at the same time as you and someone that you can and say go- a walking buddy or something (Silvia)

Feeling isolated in the home environment postpartum often diminished women's motivation to make healthy lifestyle choices

Managing the home and work environment

Some women recounted making adaptations to their routines to overcome the time barriers to a healthy lifestyle after having a baby:

Well I do think the buggy is a great thing, because I think most women want to go out and show off their baby in their buggy, so the walking I think is very good... I just think you've got to kind of base it around what you're doing, your normal every day stuff, you can't be joining gyms ... there's just no time so (Miriam).

Many of the mothers also felt that minding children and housework kept them active and facilitated postpartum weight loss.

Bodily constraints

Bodily constraints during pregnancy were often perceived to limit women's control over lifestyle practices and weight gain:

My circumstances, during my first pregnancy, they were fine really up until about 22 or 24 weeks when I developed pubic symphysis disorder and I couldn't move. That affected my eating because John (husband) was working fulltime so it ended up being an awful lot of take-aways. Throughout my second pregnancy, from the very start I had the same thing and dinners were left and it ended up being take-aways (Laura)

Bodily constraints

- These physical conditions often continued into the early postpartum period or longer.
- Availability of support from health professionals and family members was perceived to be crucial in recovery

Weight consciousness

Weight gain accepted as natural part of pregnancy, which you shouldn't worry about, as everyone gains weight differently

Some described an increased consciousness regarding weight gain in their second pregnancy, if they had problems losing weight after their first pregnancy:

I think I was probably more watchful the second time around not to try and overdo it on eating crap, you know. Because I know that weight doesn't just fall off. Once you have the baby, you don't just go back to your figure immediately.
(Pauline)

Weight consciousness

Bodily changes of pregnancy diminished their ability to monitor their weight gain:

Because you are not trying to fit into the same clothes I suppose you are not as worried about your weight as you should be (Clare)

A small number of women were advised that their weight gain was too high and felt surprised, stressed, or annoyed by the comments:

The first time I was probably quite stressed because the consultant ... I felt like I was going to Weight Watchers every week (Silvia)

Weight consciousness

Losing the pregnancy weight was perceived as a 'battle' by some mothers and a 'natural decline' by others.

After pregnancy, some of the women perceived they had little or no weight to lose:

Well I'm back to what I was before I had him. And was within about 4 weeks of having him. Not by doing, because I was breast feeding, I didn't do anything drastic or anything...I think I just put on the weight for the bump, and once my bump went down that was fine (Susan)

Others, felt very big after giving birth:

God I just felt huge after having her initially (Clare).

Weigh consciousness

Many of the women were more weight conscious during the postpartum period than pregnancy:

I felt I was definitely overweight, it's okay when you're pregnant I suppose when you've actually got the belly out here and you think you've got an excuse but then when you've actually had your baby, you know, you just feel, okay, no I'm just walking around and I'm big and I'm not doing anything about it. That's it, I just felt uncomfortable (Celia)

Nonetheless, body image was not a central concern for many of the mothers, as they prioritised their demanding motherhood role.

Weight consciousness

Many of the mothers tried to avoid being over-conscious of their weight postpartum.

Some were more 'watchful' of their eating in later postpartum, but were clear about not dieting.

Changes in body shape and size since pregnancy, especially small changes, were accepted by some of the mothers:

As I said I'm fitting into the same clothes that I fitted into before I had David (second child), mostly you know, but I'm not concerned about my weight (Emma).

Weight consciousness

In contrast, some of the mothers were highly weight conscious postpartum:

I'd say I suppose I'm more conscious of what I'm eating. I'm kinda looking at the fat and the ye know the calories...because I've been counting it, so I'm more conscious of what I'm eating (Lisa)

Difficulties losing weight and a changed body shape was very distressing for these highly weight conscious mothers:

I find it very frustrating. I absolutely hate my figure and I wish I was back at a size 12 (Cliona).

Implications

- Increased awareness regarding avoiding ‘eating for two’ and benefits of physical activity for mother and baby during pregnancy
- Advice about safe physical activity in pregnancy
- Physical conditions need timely support in hospital and at home
- Group-based community interventions may help to promote postpartum weight loss, whilst also tackling social isolation by fostering women’s peer support structures.