



A qualitative insight into women's experience of their post partum body image

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Abstract

Pregnancy and the postpartum period can feel like puberty all over again for many women, as fluctuations in hormones, sleep, energy and appetite throw off the body's reliable responses to mood and weight management. Body image perception of the Post partum women may vary, and it depends up on the strategies adopted by them. A discrepancy between women's body image and this constructed ideal can cause body dissatisfaction, possibly leading to significant psychological distress. A Qualitative study was conducted with a goal to study regarding women's experience of their post-partum body image. The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of women regarding their post-partum body image alteration and how it affects the physical and psychological wellbeing and to identify the ways of accepting or reducing any dissatisfaction. Purposive sampling techniques was used to select 15 samples from urban community. Most of the samples expressed they felt weak in their post-partum period. Participants were thinking that after delivery they will come back to pre-pregnant state within 1 month. "I have tried many things like dieting, walking, abdomen exercise even, I tried keto also "I lose my weight, but I will never come back to a pre pregnant body.

Keywords: Women, experience, postpartum, body image

Introduction

A woman's body image is a psychological representation of her body comprising her attitudes and self-perceptions of her appearance, developing from biological, psychological, and social influences. It can be significantly affected by the rapid and extensive physical changes during pregnancy and post-partum, signifying a transition to motherhood parallel to the psychological assimilation of this role. Pregnancy is a complicated period for women in that it is often the first-time weight gain is expected and accepted. A social constructionist approach to body image explains the ideal body as a socially constructed phenomenon when physical characteristics are imbued with moral judgements.

Need for the study

In our day-to-day interaction with female colleagues and self-experience of the researchers, we found that in our society women are struggling with many mental conflicts because of the pre-existing societal norms. Women may be working or home maker depending on their choice or condition but ultimately, they have to face comments from their family or colleagues specially during post-natal period they unknowingly or knowingly are in a rat race to obtain perfect body figure irrespective of the difference. Even during antenatal period, they are being judged by others regarding their body image, but we all know all people cannot be fitted in to one shoe and its very important for the women to accept their body image in a healthier way. It was

also experienced/observed that body dissatisfaction dominated the postpartum period. Through this present study the researchers wish to explore the body image concern during post-partum and to identify the ways of accepting or reducing any dissatisfaction.

Research Goal

To explore the women's experience of their post-partum body image.

Purpose

To explore the experience of women regarding their post-partum body image alteration and how it affects the physical and psychological wellbeing and to identify the ways of accepting or reducing any dissatisfaction.

Research Questions

1. What do you feel about your body?
2. What were your expectations regarding post partum body changes.
3. Did your expectation affect your psychological wellbeing? If yes how you have coped with it.
4. Have you seen a change in your attitude towards your body over pregnancy or the postpartum time?
5. Have you taken any steps to come back to your pre pregnant body? If yes, what steps have you taken?
6. Do you compare your body to others around you?

Research Methodology

Research Approach : Qualitative study approach
 Research Design : Phenomenological framework.
 Research Setting : Selected Urban area of Indore.
 Sampling Technique : Snowball sampling technique
 Tool : Structured open-ended Questionnaire
 Socio-demographic data assessment tool
 Sample : 15 women with children less than 3 years

Inclusion criteria

- Who are willing to participate in the study.
- Those women having only one child less than 3 years of age.

Exclusion criteria

- Not willing to participate.
- Women having more than one child.
- Those who are pregnant.

Method of data collection

The aim, objective and nature of the study were explained to the participants. Confidentiality was assured to get their co-operation throughout the process of data collection. Informed consent was obtained from the study sample. Before starting the interview, samples were requested to fill the socio-demographic tool. Structured open-ended questions asked during the interview aims to women’s experience of their post-partum body image explore the women’s experience of their post-partum body image. For a deeper and better understanding of participants experience and to explore the data subsequent questions (What do you mean? Why do you think so? Please explain little more) were asked based on the preliminary responses. The researcher always asked to give an example for the better extraction of information from study participants. Interview session was extended for approximately 30-45 minutes. Audio data is collected during interview was reviewed many times for an accurate data transcription. Triangulation and Member checking was done to check the validity of the participant’s response. Transcript interpretation was done based on research questions.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Socio-Demographic Variable

Demographic data	Focus Group
Age (bellow 25 years)	69.23%
Religion (Hindu)	76.92%
Educational status (Graduation and above)	61.53%
Employment status (Housewife)	76.92%
Breast feeding mothers	30.76%
Type of delivery (Vaginal Delivery)	61.53%
Method of feeding (Breast feeding)	84.61%

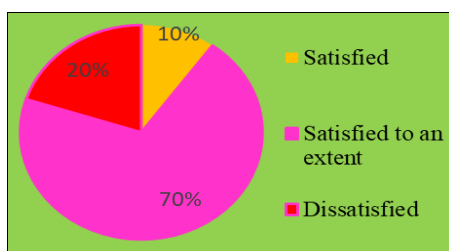


Fig 1: Satisfaction level on post-partum body image

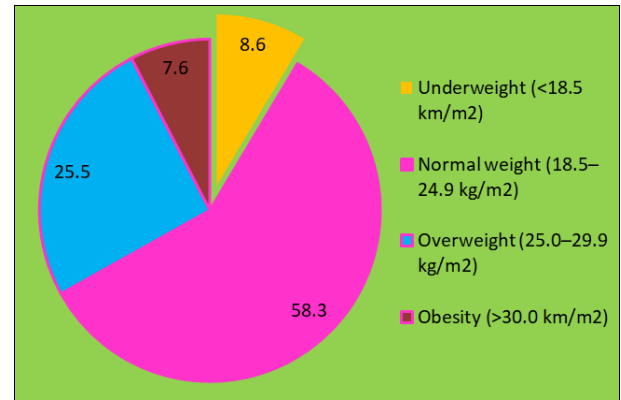


Fig 2: BMI Distribution

Perception about body image

Sub themes: Feelings of Insecurity, Loss and Uncertainty, struggle with this transition, Attractiveness, and acceptance.

Majority of the participants feel that their post-birth body is drastically different from their pre-birth body, and it can take a long time for the body to return to its prebirth weight and shape. One of the participants said, “I feel like I have become an obese unstructured human being” “I feel like I am not able to do any activities that easily that I could do when I was not pregnant”. Other member given contradictory statement that “after having my baby, was I felt more confident. Like, I just had a baby.”

Expectations regarding post-partum body changes

Sub themes: Fatty, hair fall, loose fatty tummy.

Most of the samples replied that they were expecting a return from the changes that pregnancy and delivery has caused them which merely happening even after exercising and dieting. Some of them mentioned that, " even though I have milk secretion, slight headache, weight gain I have heard this all will come back to normal soon".

Effect of body image expectation on psychological wellbeing

Sub themes: Social comparison, criticism, unfitted cloths, regardless of low.

Many participants expressed that they felt that they are less attractive after the baby born. Majority of the samples feel dissatisfied with their body due to changes in the shape. Supported with this one participant replayed “yes it affect my confidence, but again I motivated myself and accepted myself as I am now” “being a mother gives me a feel to accept me am I am today”. stated: ‘I compare myself with lots of people, whether I know them or not, I sit there and I’m like,

Steps takes to come back to a pre pregnant body

Sub themes: Physical activity, Dietary adjustments, cope with weight gain, shampoos and creams for hair loss, wore a compression/supporters bra, self comparison, comparison to others

Participants were aware about the need of a healthy body for a healthy life. Supported this one participant said “it all simply makes you feel better and confident in yourself”

another sample replied that I have tried many things but it doesn't work ...now I started accepting myself". One participant even remarked that the changes of her body were cool and that having her child increased her confidence:

Summary

Body image experience of postpartum women are varied its depends up on their expectation on their body image. This study explores the experience of the women regarding their post-partum body alteration. Many physiological and psychological factors contributing to the adaptation of these body changes.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

Reference

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