



MOTHERHOOD- A BOON OR A BANE IN SELF ESTEEM

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ABSTRACT

Motherhood is a special and universal gift that nature bestows upon women, entrusting them with a great deal of responsibility. A woman's life is impacted by each stage of motherhood, but the final one—childrearing—carries the most responsibility. Being a mother is a phase that is frequently fraught with challenges. Self-esteem is an essential component of mental and emotional well-being. One's sense of worth, self-confidence, and self-esteem can all be significantly impacted by motherhood. This impact can vary from person to person and can depend on individual circumstances and experiences. On one hand, Motherhood can increase self-esteem and self-confidence as it requires individuals to take on new roles and responsibilities, which can give them a sense of purpose and accomplishment. On the other hand, Motherhood can also bring about moments of self-doubt and insecurity. The pressure to be a "perfect" mother and the constant comparison to others can lead to feelings of inadequacy and lower self-esteem. Therefore, it is essential for women to prioritize self-care and seek support when needed to maintain a healthy sense of self during this journey.

KEYWORDS : Motherhood, Self-Esteem, Pregnancy, Teenage motherhood, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, Cognitive Behavior Therapy

INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is recognized as a dynamic, life-altering and ongoing process of transition in a woman's identity, and a permanent shift in a woman's life. Pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period are recognized as neurohormonal processes (Hoekzema et al., 2017). A substantial number of women, going through the process of becoming and being a mother, pursue finding equilibrium in new or renewed motherhood (Mercer, 2004; Emmanuel et al., 2011). (1)

Becoming a mother in all societies has been considered as the most crucial role for women. Although some women avoid childbearing or defer it, becoming a mother is mostly inevitable. The birth of the first child despite being a happy event puts the mother into crisis and lots of stress and faces her with new roles and responsibilities (2, 3).

The first year after childbirth is not only a vital period regarding the physical, emotional, and psychological development, but also a significant time for challenging first-time mothers' capacities in adjusting to their maternal roles (4, 5). In the process of becoming a mother a woman goes through a period of change, instability (6, 7) and reorganization of life (8). This psychological change can be influenced by the individual condition of a woman, her outlooks and beliefs, her social and economical condition, her preparedness and knowledge of the situation as well as her psychological condition. (9)

For all women pregnancy and the birth of a child represents a time of change, in identity and role, as well as physiology. It is also a time of emotional change which for some women may be experienced as a substantial upheaval and for others as more of a change in the balance of emotions (Green, 1990). (10)

Becoming a mother is a dynamic, evolving process that is influenced by the mother's social, cultural, environmental, and personal experiences (Mercer, 2004; Nelson, 2003). New mothers actively adapt to new demands and challenges in the mothering role; however, this transition may be considered difficult and distressing for some mothers, depending on their perceptions and resources (Mercer, 1995, 2004; Rogan, Schmied, Barclay, Everitt, & Willie, 1997). (11)

Lindsey (1997) discussed the pressures women face before becoming mothers. Starting in childhood, direct and indirect messages are bestowed upon girls, indicating that their maternal destinies have been predetermined. As females

mature, such messages continue; motherhood is a societal role that requires complete devotion, including the sacrifice of women's own needs and desires. Women who choose to work outside of the home in order to maintain their identities, establish mental and social stimulation, or earn a living are risk-takers, as this decision tends to create guilt (Bee, 1992). (12, 13)

Motherhood and Self Esteem

Self-esteem refers to a person's subjective evaluation of self-worth (Orth & Robins, 2014). In the transition to motherhood, studies have attempted to identify a normative pattern of change in self-esteem. In a Norwegian study (van Scheppingen et al., 2018) in women who had had their first, second, third or fourth child, it was found that in all subgroups, self-esteem tended to decrease during pregnancy, increase until the child was 6 months old, and gradually decreased over the following years. In other studies (e.g. Bleidorn et al., 2016), a sharp decrease in self-esteem has been reported after the birth of the baby, followed by a gradual decrease in the following years. However, these studies have not predicted changes in self-esteem on the basis of childbirth-related variables. (14,15)

A woman is physiologically equipped to bear children. She attains motherhood through the act of carrying a child in her womb and giving birth. A deep-rooted biological determinism, employed and interpreted by the patriarchy for its own benefits, lets the society carry on in the belief that all women are to bear children, and assumes that mothering and childcare knowledge come naturally to them once they give birth. Both assumptions are harmful to the women and their children. Women with little knowledge of prenatal care during pregnancy end up with a sense of isolation, which may result in depression (16, 17)

The transition to parenthood is considered one of the major milestones in people's lives that come with great joy and happiness (Hansen, 2012). Yet, empirical evidence does not support such an increase in happiness for parents. While parenthood may benefit some outcomes such as life meaning, people with (especially younger) children often show lower life satisfaction and higher depressive symptoms than people without children (Evenson and Simon, 2005; Umberson et al., 2010; Hansen, 2012; Stanca, 2012). (18)

A research study conducted on Intensive mothering norms prescribes women to be perfect mothers. Recent research has

shown that women's experiences of pressure toward perfect parenting are related to higher levels of guilt and stress. The findings suggest that intensive mothering norms might have severe costs for women's family and work outcomes, and provide insights into where to direct efforts to reduce motherhood hardships and protect women's career ambitions. (18, 19)

Teenage Motherhood

Adolescence is a stage of growth and development of great relevance. Unplanned teenage pregnancies can be considered a global public health problem due to the high impact on the present and future of these young people, as well as their possible offspring. For women in communities where motherhood is highly desired, motherhood is considered crucial to the woman's identity. Teenage motherhood, occurring at a critical developmental stage of teenagers' lives, has been identified as having adverse social and health consequences. (20)

The Research study was to analyze the relationship between self-esteem, attitudes toward love, and sexual assertiveness among pregnant and non-pregnant teenagers. The study was conducted with 225 women from Ecuador (34.2% pregnant; Mean age = 16; SD = 1.15). This study, also considered whether their pregnancy was planned or not. Self-reported measures such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Love Attitudes Scale, and the Sexual Assertiveness Scale between 2018 and 2019 were administered. Self-esteem was higher in adolescents with a planned pregnancy than in those women whose pregnancy was not planned. (21)

Impact Of Physiological Changes During Pregnancy On Self Esteem

During pregnancy, the pregnant mother undergoes significant anatomical and physiological changes in order to nurture and accommodate the developing fetus. These changes begin after conception and affect every organ system in the body. It is important to understand the normal physiological changes occurring in pregnancy as this will help differentiate from adaptations that are abnormal. (22)

There are many studies showed that these profound physiological changes would cause first time mothers body to distance from their mental ideals. Generally, when women's body perception during pregnancy is not accepted and leads to negative attitudes toward their bodies, their mental health might be harmed. (23)

A qualitative study aimed to explore body perception in pregnant women because dramatic body changes in pregnancy cause severe concerns among pregnant women about their appearance. The results showed that pregnant women's body perception could be described as maternal feelings and feminine attitudes toward changes during pregnancy compared to mental ideals of facial and body beauty. It is recommended that Iranian women's body perception during pregnancy be evaluated using this study results and that counseling interventions be implemented for women with negative body perceptions. (24, 25)

Psychological Changes In Women During Pregnancy And After Delivery

During pregnancy and the postpartum period, Women undergo marked bio-psychological changes. Their attitudes toward pregnancy reflect deeply felt beliefs about all aspects of reproduction, including whether the pregnancy was planned and whether the baby is wanted. Psychologically healthy women often find pregnancy a means of self-realization. Many women report that being pregnant is a creative act gratifying a fundamental need. Other women use pregnancy to diminish self-doubts about femininity or to reassure themselves that they can function as women in the

most basic sense. Still others view pregnancy negatively; they may fear childbirth or feel inadequate about mothering.

The gestational period is divided into first, second, and third trimesters. In the first trimester (weeks 1–12), the woman begins to gain weight, and mood swings may occur, such as moments of depression and agitation. The second trimester (weeks 13–25) is characterized by the onset of fetal movements and the belly becomes more visible (5). This trimester is also considered the most emotionally stable. In the third trimester (from week 26 onwards), there is a greater increase in maternal weight and this is the period of greatest apprehension for most women due to proximity to delivery. Up to 6 months after delivery, women deal with the complex recovery of the body from changes that occurred during pregnancy and childbirth, and they are susceptible to psychological vulnerability. Mental health disorders affect many women during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, and low levels of body appreciation during pregnancy and postpartum can have negative consequences for the wellbeing of the woman, her partner, and her family, and for the birth and development of the child. (26)

Psychiatric Aspects Of Pregnancy Postpartum Depression

Many women experience some affective symptoms during the postpartum period, 4 to 6 weeks following delivery. Most of these women report symptoms consistent with "baby blues, a transient mood disturbance characterized by mood lability, sadness, dysphoria, subjective confusion, and tearfulness. No professional treatment is required other than education and support for the new mother. If the symptoms persist longer than 2 weeks, evaluation is indicated for postpartum depression. (27, 28)

Postpartum Psychosis

Postpartum psychosis (sometimes called puerperal psychosis) is example of psychotic disorder not otherwise specified that occurs in women who have recently delivered a baby. The syndrome is often characterized by the mother's depression, delusions, and thoughts of harming either herself or her infant. Such ideation suicide or infanticide must be carefully monitored; although rare, some mothers have acted on these ideas. (27, 28)

Counsel A Mother Having Low Self Esteem

It is essential for the counselor to assist women who are struggling with low self esteem in coming to terms with and appreciating who they are as individuals. A relatively recent therapeutic approach is acceptance and commitment therapy. ACT focuses on clients gaining self-awareness and psychological flexibility.

Helping clients gain acceptance of the present moment, mindfulness, emotional and psychological flexibility, and acceptance of oneself with problems are ways that ACT therapists facilitate client change. (29)

Here are some tips to deal with low self esteem during motherhood:

Have Realistic Expectations

Setting unrealistic expectations for yourself as a mother will only cause your self-esteem to take a nosedive. Don't try and be the perfect mother, they don't exist (sorry Mom). Just try and do your best and enjoy the experience as best you can. (30)

Don't Compare Yourself to Other Mothers

Nothing pokes at our self-esteem quite like unfair comparisons. While it's fine to seek advice from other moms, never make comparisons or you'll just set yourself up to feel badly about your own mothering abilities. (30)

A research study conducted in some of the women experience

low self-esteem and negative body image in pregnancy and postpartum. These two factors along with other factors can reduce the rate of exclusive breastfeeding among women. Cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) is one of the psychological approaches that is effective on the improvement of self-esteem and body image and through which might lead to the increase of exclusive breastfeeding among women. (31)

CONCLUSION

Overall, Motherhood can have a complex and dynamic impact on one's self-esteem. It can bring both positive and negative experiences, and the effects can vary throughout different stages of motherhood. Being a mother is a difficult job with lots of responsibilities and emotions. Hence, Mothers need counseling and supportive therapies to deal with their problems.

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