

Pregnant women with bulimia have more anxiety and depression

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Women who have bulimia in pregnancy have more symptoms of anxiety and depression compared to pregnant women without eating disorders. A new study from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (NIPH) shows that they also have lower self-esteem and are more dissatisfied with life and their relationship with their partner.

The findings come from the world's first major population study of psychosocial factors in bulimia (bulimia nervosa) during pregnancy. Bulimia in pregnancy can have serious consequences for both mother and child.

The new study includes more than 41 000 pregnant women who responded to a questionnaire from the Norwegian Mother and Child Study (MoBa) from the NIPH.

Higher incidence of physical and sexual abuse

Out of more than 41 000 pregnant women, 96 (0.2 %) met the criteria for broadly defined bulimia (bulimia nervosa) in the first trimester of pregnancy. 67 of the women reported that they had also had bulimia six months before pregnancy, while 26 had developed bulimia after becoming pregnant. It is unknown whether these women had bulimia earlier in life.

Women with bulimia reported lower self-esteem and less satisfaction

with life and their relationship with their partner. In addition, they reported a higher prevalence of symptoms associated with anxiety and depression.

Women with bulimia reported a higher prevalence of life-long physical abuse, sexual abuse and major depression compared with others, says Cecilie Knoph Berg at the Division of Mental Health at the NIPH.

Women who had bulimia six months before pregnancy but who were symptom-free in the first trimester, experienced higher self-esteem and satisfaction with life compared to other women with persistent symptoms.

Bulimia was measured six months before pregnancy and in the first trimester of pregnancy by completing the questionnaire in the first trimester.

Knoph Berg is the first author of "Psychosocial factors associated with broadly-defined bulimia nervosa during early pregnancy: Findings from the Norwegian mother and child cohort study" which is published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry.

Mostly women with bulimia

Eating disorders affect both young and old but often occur for the first time in adolescence. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are about ten times more common among women than men. At any one time, Norwegian women in the age group 15-44 years have an eating disorder: 0.3 percent have anorexia, two percent have bulimia and three percent have binge eating disorder. The figures are based on Norwegian studies, with international studies showing similar results.

Source: Norwegian Institute of Public Health

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