

**Psychosocial factors among pregnant women attending antenatal clinics of Colombo South Teaching Hospital; a comparative study between normal weight and overweight/obese individuals**

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**Background** - Pregnancy is often accompanied by psychological challenges like depression, anxiety, stress, and fear of childbirth (FOC). Overweight and obesity, indicated by a high BMI, relate to greater obstetric risks, which can heighten psychological distress. This comparative cross-sectional study aimed to explore the psychosocial factors affecting normal weight and overweight/obese pregnant women attending antenatal clinics at the Colombo South Teaching Hospital (CSTH).

**Materials and Methods** - The study involved 188 pregnant mothers selected through systematic random sampling at CSTH. BMI was categorized using WHO South Asian guidelines. Psychological distress was evaluated with the validated DASS-21 scale and FOC was assessed using a modified, validated Likert-type scale. Social factors (family support, income, and education) were also analyzed. Associations were determined using chi-square tests, with  $p < 0.05$  considered statistically significant.

**Results** - A high BMI was significantly linked to an increased psychological burden. Among those with severe anxiety, 75% were overweight or obese ( $p = 0.0045$ ). Depression ( $p = 0.0477$ ) and FOC ( $p = 0.0487$ ) were also significantly higher in this group. Social factors compounded these symptoms: 85% of mothers with severe anxiety reported low family support ( $p < 0.001$ ), and 65% of those with severe depression had low income ( $p = 0.021$ ). Interaction effects revealed compounded risks; The risk for severe depression increased three-fold (OR=3.1, 95% CI:1.25–7.68,  $p = 0.012$ ) in mothers who were both overweight/obese and low-income. The link between high BMI and anxiety was strongest in mothers with low family support (OR=2.8, 95% CI:1.15–6.81,  $p = 0.03$ ). Overweight/obese mothers with low education faced a five times greater risk (OR=5.0, 95% CI:1.58–15.82,  $p = 0.009$ ) of moderate FOC.

**Discussion** - Higher BMI strongly correlates with increased levels of depression, anxiety, and FOC. These negative psychological effects are compounded by poor social factors. The greatest psychological burden occurs in mothers facing the dual challenge of high BMI and limited social or financial resources. Regular prenatal psychological screening should be targeted at mothers with both high BMI and indicators of low family support, income, or education.