

STIGMA AND EMOTIONAL DISTRESS IN GESTATIONAL DIABETES PREGNANCIES: FINDINGS FROM A LARGE NATIONAL SURVEY

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Background

Multiple studies have shown that women with gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) experience stigma and emotional distress, but most existing evidence comes from small qualitative studies. This study explored these experiences through a large national survey.

Methods

An online cross-sectional survey was conducted among women who had experienced GDM within the past 5 years in the UK. Recruitment was via targeted Facebook and Instagram advertisements. The survey, comprising dichotomous, Likert-scale and open-ended questions, was informed by previous research and re-viewed by women with lived experience. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively using SPSS, and free-text responses underwent content analysis.

Results

A total of 1800 valid responses were obtained, with high completion rates. Women reported marked emotional impacts at GDM diagnosis, most commonly anxiety (68%), fear (48%), shock (46%) and upset (58%). Stigma was widespread, with many reporting guilt (60%), shame (38%) and embarrassment (48%), often linked to food choices, weight, or perceived blame. Most participants expressed strong concern that their dietary behaviours might harm their baby (72% strongly agreed) or raise glucose levels (58% strongly agreed). Postpartum, many women felt abandoned by healthcare services (36%strongly agreed), reported limited emotional support (32%strongly agreed) and described ongoing depression and anxiety (25% strongly agreed).

Conclusion

This large national survey highlights the pervasive nature of stigma and emotional distress during and after pregnancies with GDM. Interventions to reduce stigma and provide structured emotional support are needed to reduce this burden and its potential negative impact on mental and physical wellbeing.