

Young Mums and Body Image

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Key Findings from the wider research

- Body dissatisfaction develops early in life and is becoming more common, with social media and online advertising exacerbating concerns. The House of Common's Health and Social Committee called for the UK Government to introduce new laws tightening the advertisement of derma fillers and that commercial images are labelled when they are digitally altered.
- The media portrayal of the 'ideal' woman means that most women feel body dissatisfaction generally, and pregnancy and post-pregnancy is an especially difficult time for women (Wallis et al. 2021). Peers and family also play a role in relaying these ideals and the accompanying pressure that goes with it (*ibid*).
- A study in Australia analysed 600 images on Instagram, the 300 top and the 300 most recent, with the hashtag 'postpartum', (Gow et al. 2022). They found most women who posted images of themselves online had low levels of fat and around half were wearing fitness attire. Only 5% of images focused on features commonly associated with a postpartum body, including stretch marks or caesarean scars. The authors suggest that conveying health information on Instagram may be necessary to interrupt potentially harmful content.
- Mothers who have an unhealthy relationship with food and body image can inadvertently affect their attachment to their children (Orbach et al. 2018). Pregnancy is a good time for midwives to understand pressures and support women to overcome these, but they are not educated about body image and lack the resources to do this meaningfully (*ibid*).
- Research in England showed that nearly 1 in 3 girls and around 1 in 7 boys were dissatisfied with their appearance (Bornioli et al. 2021).
- Women need to be supported to appreciate their bodies, reframing pregnancy and birth to be about body satisfaction, rather than feeling the pressure to 'bounce back' which is not realistic (Hogkinson, 2014; Wallis et al. 2021).

Calls to Action

For professionals working in Edinburgh

- To include in pre-natal classes the changes to the women's body and to make people aware that these are lasting and 'bouncing back' is not a realistic expectation.
- To include in midwives training information around the impact of body imaging so that they are confident to include this in their discussions with women.
- To include in education in schools about the postpartum body, and other changes women and men experience later in life, e.g., the menopause, so that there is more of an understanding about the different stages people experience.
- To educate young people about respecting their own and others bodies.

Next Steps

Angela is in the process of creating an animation that she wants to use as a way of raising awareness of this issue and carry out her own research. Angela wants to create her own business supporting people to reconfigure life changes as milestones and promote cultural change around the ageing process.