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## How Pregnancy Affects Memory and Attention

Approximately two thirds of pregnant or recently gave birth women suggest some degree of cognitive deficits such as in attention and most prevalent in memory, during pregnancy (Brett & Baxendale, 2001). This report will investigate the scientific evidence on the effects of pregnancy on memory, to examine whether such deficit are really exists or are just anecdotal reports. This report will take into consideration both objective and subjective evidence since the research on the subject refers mainly in those two categories approach. Thus, the report aims to help pregnant women to improve their knowledge and understanding whether such evidence exist and how affect pregnant women cognition and memory.(50)

Women often claim that memory adversely affected by pregnancy (Brett & Baxendale, 2001), and since more than two third of women experience pregnancy at least once it is important to comprehend whether objective deficits underlies the subjective complaints. Therefore, is substantial to distinguish and understand the differences between the subjective and objective memory impairment during pregnancy, since the investigation on this topic falls mainly in those two categories. Subjective memory impairments are those made by women self-reports based on everyday situations such as forgetfulness; many subjective reports address memory deficits (Brindle, Brown, Brown, Griffith & Turner, 1991). In addition, objective memory impairments are those encountered in a well-controlled or laboratory environment in which the experiment conditions are controlled (Brindle et al., 1991). Even though, there are a series of studies examine memory and cognitive deficits during pregnancy as well as postpartum (Niven & Brodie, 1996), lack of studies has investigated those deficits in memory abilities by examine the relationship between subjective memory complaints and objective measures of cognitive function (Keenan et al., 1998).

Recently, an investigation distinguished pregnant women with non-pregnant women on a series of everyday life setting test (subjective approach) and well-controlled laboratory tests (objective approach). The results of this investigation support that pregnancy significantly related with everyday life problems. However, none of the objective laboratory tests reveal a connection between pregnancy and memory impairments (Cuttler et al., 2011). Therefore, the results support that women during pregnancy demonstrate memory deficits in everyday live settings when women have competing demands for attention, but in a laboratory environment where extraneous variables such as distractions are controlled those impairments are not exist.As is mentioned above, approximately 50 to 80 per cent of women frequently report having some degree of cognitive and memory issues that they ascribed to pregnancy.

There is a considerable number of subjective studies indicating pregnancy-related impairment

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on memory. In a naturalistic study about the effects of pregnancy in memory (Jarrahi-Zaden et al., 1969). The finding indicating that 12 per cent of pregnant women accused to have 'mental foggiess' during the period of pregnancy. However, the accusation of such foggiess was increase to 16 per cent after giving birth. Furthermore, later findings by Poser et al. (1986) reveals that more than 80 per cent of pregnant women of their sample report forgetfulness raise during pregnancy, with the 38 per cent of their sample suggesting that forgetfulness was the only symptom they faced during pregnancy period.

In a recent study, to investigate the effects on memory and attention was used retrospective questionnaires and longitudinal diary sampling for naturalistic measurements (Crawley et al, 2003). The results indicate that 40 pregnant women of the sample claimed to have significant impairment of memory and attention relating to the responses of non-pregnant women. Although, the subjective evidence in a study by Rendell and Henry (2008), indicates that in a naturalistic measure of retrospective memory were observed to significantly relate the memory impairment with pregnancy. By contrast, measurements based on objective evidence does not clearly support that the impairments in memory are attributed from pregnancy, as it is claimed on subjective evidence. A study by Keenan et al. (1998) was investigate the effects of pregnancy on declarative memory. The study examine the immediate and delayed recall ability of pregnant and non-pregnant women in each trimester and postpartum. The results support that pregnant women in both condition had significantly lower effects than non-pregnant during the third trimester of pregnancy. Comparable results was found in a recent study by De Groot et al. (2006).

The current study was examining the ability of free recall of pregnant and non-pregnant women. The findings of this study reveals that pregnant women had significantly lower recall regarding with non-pregnant women in all conditions. Furthermore, in a recent literature review Henry and Rendell (2007) of the effects pregnancy on recognition memory, the findings indicate that recognition memory in pregnant women was worse than non-pregnant women. In a further investigation Rendell and Henry (2008) conduct a study to measure the prospective memory; the ability to remember to perform future actions at the right time, such as making an appointment. Researcher examine in contrast pregnant and non-pregnant women during the third trimester of pregnancy and in a time period of 13 months after giving birth. The findings suggest that prospective memory deficits were not correlated with pregnancy. (Objective study) This discrepancy between the consistent subjective investigations and the inconsistent objective evidence increase the doubt of whether pregnant women claims to present such cognitive impairments not because pregnancy actually affect cognition but because that's what is expected from society (Jarrett, 2010).

According to Crawley et al. (2008) it is possible that the society expect from pregnant women to have deficit in memory and attention during pregnancy due to the incorrect view of people of the

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effect of hormones on pregnant women. Yet another possibility is that pregnancy is compared with cognitive impairments, due to the importance of this event in a woman life. Such huge life event accompanied with large number of hormonal physical and psychological changes which are claimed to be negatively impact memory (ref.). One potential candidate to explain pregnancy-related deficits in memory is cortisol, a steroid hormone known to increase during pregnancy period (Allolio et al., 1990) and negatively affect memory. (Heffelfinger & Newcomer, 2001). Another possible candidate to cause such effect on memory during pregnancy in the reduction of estrogen (Sherwin, 2012). Furthermore, consistent with increased depressed mood and anxiety during pregnancy it reveals have negative impact in memory (Cuttler et al., 2011).

Crawley suggest that those symptoms may linked to other major life events where those conditions might be provided. The state of pregnancy is also associated with a number of physical symptoms such as nausea and physical discomfort, sleep disturbances (Crawley, 2002) and an increased number of novel daily demands such as preparation for the baby's arrival, which may distract pregnant women and therefore compromise their memory performance. Further, physical symptoms are associated with worse performance on subjective memory tasks (Cuttler at al., 2011) as are sleep patterns (Casey, Huntsdate, Angus, & James, 1999) but not objective memory deficits (Casey et al., 1999).

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