



Exploring needs for support in pregnant women with eating disorders

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Pregnancy involves major physiological and psychological changes that can affect women's relationship with food and body image and increase vulnerability for those with current or past eating disorders (EDs). Between 4–13% of women experience significant ED symptoms during the peripartum period, which can have adverse effects on both the mother and her child. There is limited research on the support needs of pregnant women with EDs.

The overall aim of this licentiate thesis is to increase our understanding of the underlying narratives and cultural constructions of EDs during pregnancy and enhance knowledge about what type of support pregnant women with EDs want.

Three studies were conducted. Study I was a systematic literature review. Studies II and III were qualitative studies based on semi-structured interviews with 22 pregnant women with ED symptoms. In Study II, the interviews were analysed using discourse analysis, and in Study III using thematic content analysis.

Study I found a limited number of studies regarding the support pregnant women with EDs request. Study II identified four discourses: pregnancy as an end to the ED, pregnancy as a loss of control, pregnancy as a parenthesis in the ED and pregnancy as a safe space for the ED. Study III revealed four main themes regarding support needs: the need for a more respectful approach from the health care professionals, the need for more competence in EDs among staff in maternal health care, the wish for more concrete help and support, and the demand for a better organisation and structure for treatment of EDs within health care.

Significant gaps exist in support for pregnant women with ED symptoms, particularly regarding ED competence in maternal healthcare. By identifying previously undescribed discourses, this study provides insights into women's perceived needs and experiences, offering guidance for more responsive, individualized, and compassionate care.