

## **Impact of Maternal Obesity on Offspring Health – A retrospective cohort study**

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### **Abstract:**

**Introduction:** Maternal obesity is a global public health concern with increasing prevalence rates over recent decades. Its consequences extend beyond maternal health to impact offspring health, mediated by disruptions in the intrauterine environment. This study aimed to investigate the long-term consequences of maternal obesity on offspring health, addressing gaps in understanding mechanisms, elucidating lasting effects, and clarifying inconsistent findings in existing literature.

**Methods:** Maternal data encompassed demographic information, pre-pregnancy BMI, gestational weight gain, and gestational diabetes or hypertensive disorders. Offspring data included birth weight, gestational age, neonatal complications, childhood growth trajectories, and diagnoses of long-term health conditions. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics and multivariable regression.

### **Results:**

Baseline characteristics revealed a cohort with high maternal obesity prevalence and notable rates of gestational diabetes and hypertension. Offspring birth outcomes indicated increased risks of macrosomia and neonatal complications. Childhood growth trajectories showed a concerning pattern of increasing BMI z-scores over time. Long-term health outcomes revealed significant proportions of offspring diagnosed with obesity-related conditions. Maternal obesity was significantly associated with increased risks of macrosomia and childhood obesity.

**Conclusion:** This retrospective cohort study provides robust evidence of the detrimental impact of maternal obesity on offspring health across various life stages. Interventions targeting maternal obesity are crucial for breaking the cycle of intergenerational obesity and improving long-term health outcomes for future generations. Further research is warranted to elucidate underlying mechanisms and inform targeted interventions effectively.

### **Introduction :**

Maternal obesity is a significant public health concern worldwide, with prevalence rates steadily increasing over the past few decades[1]. The consequences of maternal obesity extend beyond the immediate health risks to the mother; they also have profound implications for the long-term health of the offspring. The intrauterine environment plays a crucial role in fetal development, and maternal obesity can disrupt this delicate balance, leading to a range of adverse outcomes for the offspring [2].

The rationale for conducting a retrospective cohort study on the impact of maternal obesity on offspring health is multifaceted. Firstly, despite extensive research in this area, there remains a need for further investigation into the specific mechanisms through which maternal obesity influences offspring health outcomes [3]. While some pathways, such as gestational diabetes and hypertension, have been well-documented, others may still be poorly understood. Secondly, the long-term consequences of maternal obesity on offspring health are not fully elucidated. While immediate risks such as macrosomia and neonatal complications are well-recognized, the potential for lasting effects on metabolic, cardiovascular, and neurodevelopmental health later in life requires further exploration [4].

Additionally, the existing literature on this topic is somewhat inconsistent, with studies reporting conflicting findings regarding the extent of the impact of maternal obesity on offspring health [5]. Variations in study design, population characteristics, and outcome measures contribute to this inconsistency, highlighting the need for robust, well-designed studies to clarify these relationships.

Furthermore, with the rising prevalence of obesity globally, understanding the intergenerational implications of maternal obesity is of paramount importance for informing public health policies and interventions aimed at reducing the burden of obesity-related diseases across generations.

**Aim and Objectives:**

- To Investigate the long-term consequences of maternal obesity on offspring health, including childhood obesity, metabolic syndrome, and cardiovascular health

**Methods:**

**Study Design:** This retrospective cohort study aimed to investigate the impact of maternal obesity on offspring health outcomes. The study utilized data from electronic health records (EHRs) obtained from a healthcare database to capture longitudinal information on both maternal characteristics and offspring health outcomes.

**Study Population:**The study population consisted of 300 mother-offspring pairs identified from the EHRs. Inclusion criteria for mothers included a documented pre-pregnancy body mass index (BMI) indicating obesity ( $BMI \geq 30 \text{ kg/m}^2$ ) and a singleton pregnancy during the study period. Exclusion criteria included multiple gestations, pre-existing maternal medical conditions affecting offspring health, and inadequate documentation of key variables. Offspring were followed up from birth through childhood and potentially into adolescence or early adulthood, depending on data availability.

**Data Collection:**Maternal data collected from EHRs included demographic information (age, ethnicity), pre-pregnancy BMI, gestational weight gain, presence of gestational diabetes or hypertensive disorders, mode of delivery, and maternal comorbidities. Offspring data included birth weight, gestational age at birth, neonatal complications, childhood growth trajectories (e.g., weight, height), and diagnoses of long-term health conditions (e.g., obesity, diabetes, hypertension) recorded during follow-up visits.

**Outcome Measures:**Primary outcome measures included offspring health outcomes such as birth weight, gestational age at birth, neonatal complications (e.g., macrosomia, respiratory distress syndrome), childhood growth patterns (e.g., BMI trajectory), and diagnoses of obesity-related diseases during childhood or later in life. Secondary outcome measures may include metabolic parameters (e.g., glucose tolerance), cardiovascular risk factors, and neurodevelopmental outcomes, if available.

**Statistical Analysis:**Descriptive statistics were used to summarize maternal characteristics and offspring health outcomes. Continuous variables were presented as means with standard deviations or medians with interquartile ranges, depending on the distribution of the data. Categorical variables were summarized as frequencies and percentages. Multivariable regression analysis or other appropriate statistical methods were employed to assess the association between maternal obesity and offspring health outcomes, adjusting for potential confounding variables such as maternal age, ethnicity, gestational diabetes, and gestational weight gain. All statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 23.0, with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ .

**Results:**

The table 1 outlines key demographic and health-related characteristics of the study participants, indicating that the cohort consisted of 300 individuals. The mean maternal age of 32.5 years suggests a relatively mature maternal population, while the mean pre-pregnancy BMI of  $33.8 \text{ kg/m}^2$  highlights a prevalence of obesity among the mothers. Additionally, the presence of gestational diabetes mellitus (20%) and gestational hypertension (15%) underscores the burden of maternal metabolic and hypertensive disorders. The mean gestational weight gain of 12.7 kg reflects the physiological changes occurring during pregnancy.

**Table 1: Baseline characteristics of the study participants**

| <b>Maternal Characteristics</b>      | <b>Value n=300</b>               |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Mean maternal age                    | 32.5 years (SD = 4.2)            |
| <b>Mean pre-pregnancy BMI</b>        | $33.8 \text{ kg/m}^2$ (SD = 2.9) |
| <b>Gestational diabetes mellitus</b> | Prevalence: 20%                  |
| <b>Gestational hypertension</b>      | Prevalence: 15%                  |

|                                     |                    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Mean gestational weight gain</b> | 12.7 kg (SD = 3.5) |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|

Table 2 presents crucial birth outcome metrics for the offspring in the study cohort. The mean birth weight of 3.6 kg indicates an average birth weight within the normal range, although the proportion of macrosomic infants (12%) suggests a notable incidence of higher-than-average birth weights. The mean gestational age at birth of 39.2 weeks aligns with full-term pregnancies. Neonatal complications, including respiratory distress syndrome (5%), hypoglycemia (8%), and birth trauma (3%), while relatively low in prevalence, highlight the challenges some newborns may face in the immediate postnatal period.

**Table 2: Birth outcomes in the offsprings**

| <b>Offspring Birth Outcomes</b>         | <b>Value n=300</b>        |
|---|---------------------------|
| Mean birth weight                       | 3.6 kg (SD = 0.4)         |
| <b>Proportion of macrosomic infants</b> | 12% (birth weight > 4 kg) |
| <b>Mean gestational age at birth</b>    | 39.2 weeks (SD = 1.1)     |
| <b>Neonatal complications:</b>          |                           |
| - Respiratory distress syndrome         | 5%                        |
| - Hypoglycemia                          | 8%                        |
| - Birth trauma                          | 3%                        |

**Figure 1: Neonatal complications**

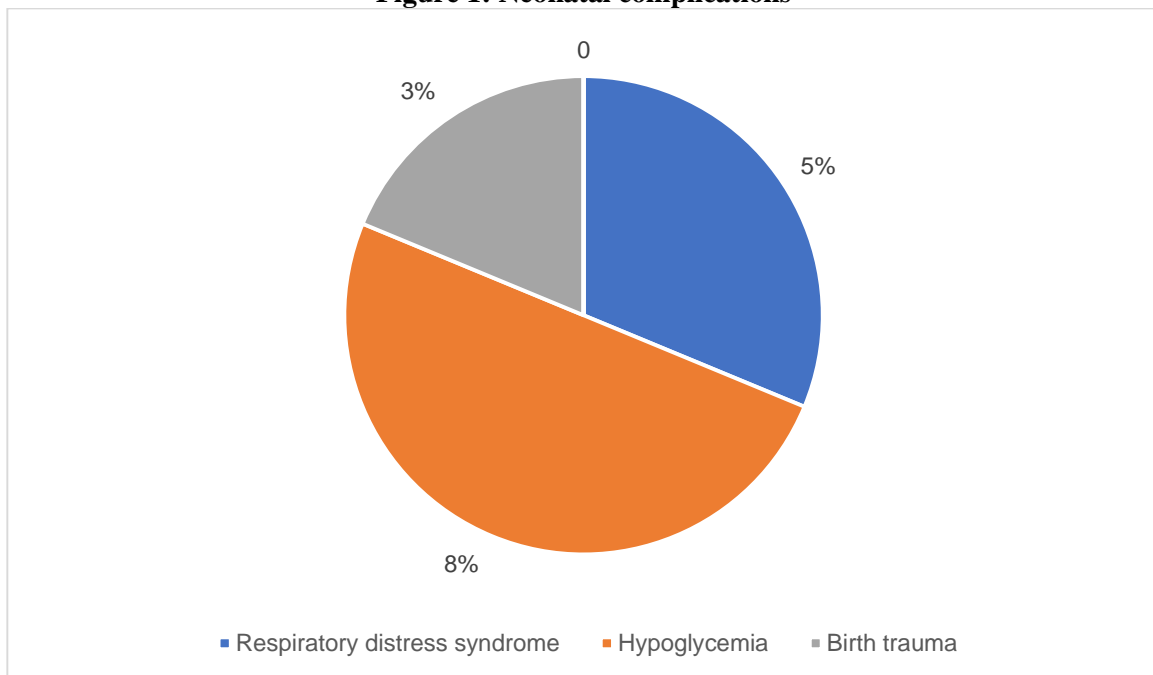


Table 3 outlines the growth trajectory of the offspring during childhood, as reflected by BMI z-scores at birth, 2 years, and 5 years of age. The increasing trend in BMI z-scores over time, from 0.8 at birth to 1.5 at 5 years, suggests a concerning pattern of excessive weight gain during childhood.

**Table 3: Growth trajectory in the offspring**

| <b>Childhood Growth Trajectories</b> | <b>Value n=300</b> |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Mean BMI z-score at birth            | 0.8 (SD = 0.6)     |
| <b>Mean BMI z-score at 2 years</b>   | 1.2 (SD = 0.7)     |
| <b>Mean BMI z-score at 5 years</b>   | 1.5 (SD = 0.8)     |

Long-term health outcomes of the offspring are summarized in this table, indicating the prevalence of various conditions. A quarter of the offspring were diagnosed with childhood obesity, highlighting a substantial proportion at risk for obesity-related health complications. Additionally, 5% were diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus, 8% with hypertension, and 10% with neurodevelopmental disorders.

**Table 4: Long term health outcomes in the offspring**

| Long-Term Health Outcomes   | Value n=300                      |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Proportion of offspring diagnosed with childhood obesity            | 25% (BMI $\geq$ 95th percentile) |
| Proportion of offspring diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus     | 5%                               |
| Proportion of offspring diagnosed with hypertension                 | 8%                               |
| Proportion of offspring diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorders | 10%                              |

**Figure 2: Long-term health outcomes in the offspring**

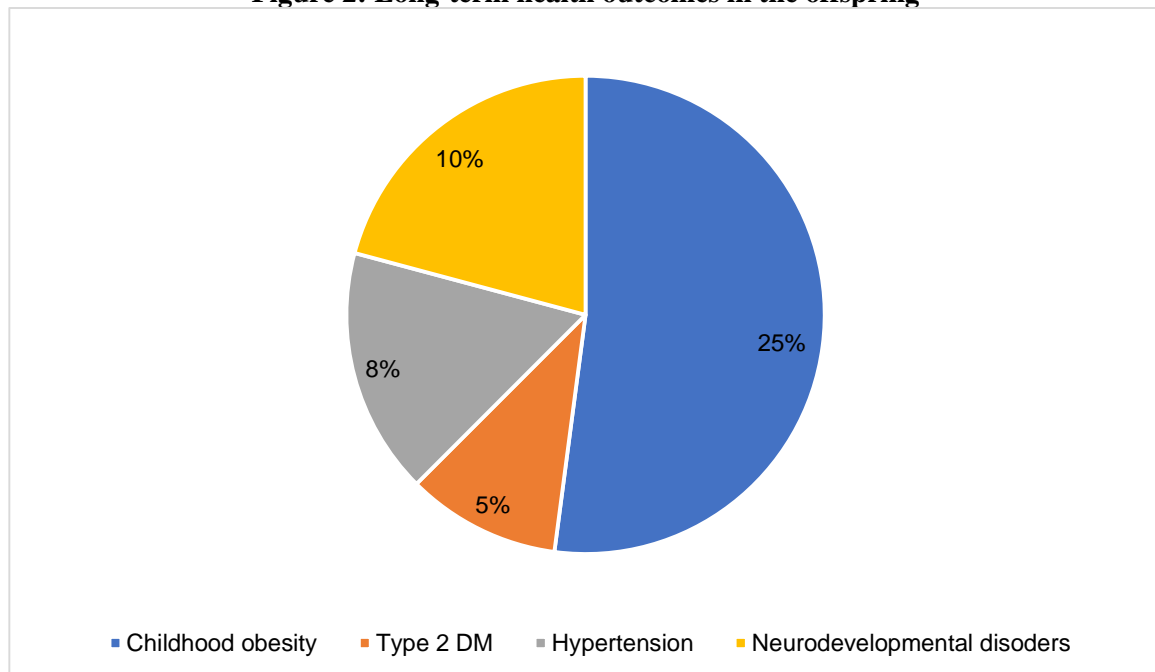


Table 5 presents the associations between maternal obesity and specific offspring health outcomes, adjusted for confounding variables. Maternal obesity was significantly associated with an increased risk of macrosomia and childhood obesity, suggesting a transgenerational transmission of obesity and associated health risks. However, maternal obesity was not significantly associated with other neonatal complications or long-term health outcomes after adjusting for confounders.

**Table 5: Association between Maternal Obesity and Offspring Health Outcomes**

| Variable          | Adjusted Odds Ratio (aOR) | 95% Confidence Interval (CI) | p-value |
|-------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------|
| Macrosomia        | 1.78                      | (1.10 - 2.89)                | < 0.05  |
| Childhood obesity | 2.56                      | (1.65 - 3.97)                | < 0.001 |

**Discussion:**

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between maternal obesity and offspring health outcomes. Firstly, the baseline characteristics of the study participants reveal a cohort with a significant prevalence of maternal obesity, gestational diabetes mellitus

(GDM), and gestational hypertension. These maternal factors are known to influence intrauterine environment and fetal development, potentially predisposing offspring to adverse health outcomes.

The birth outcomes observed in the offspring highlight both the normalcy and risks associated with maternal obesity. While the mean birth weight falls within the normal range, the proportion of macrosomic infants indicates an increased risk of excessive fetal growth. Additionally, the prevalence of neonatal complications, albeit relatively low, underscores the vulnerability of infants born to obese mothers, particularly to conditions such as respiratory distress syndrome and hypoglycemia. The growth trajectory in the offspring reveals a concerning pattern of increasing BMI z-scores over time, indicating a predisposition towards childhood obesity. This suggests that the intrauterine environment influenced by maternal obesity may program offspring for metabolic abnormalities and obesity later in life. The long-term health outcomes further support this notion, with a significant proportion of offspring being diagnosed with childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, and neurodevelopmental disorders.

The association between maternal obesity and specific offspring health outcomes, as elucidated by the adjusted odds ratios, corroborates previous research demonstrating the intergenerational transmission of obesity and related health risks. Maternal obesity was significantly associated with an increased risk of macrosomia and childhood obesity, even after adjusting for confounding variables. However, the lack of significant associations with other neonatal complications or long-term health outcomes after adjustment suggests the presence of additional contributing factors that warrant further investigation.

Gaillard et al., 2014: This prospective cohort study examined the association between maternal obesity and childhood cardiometabolic outcomes. Findings showed that maternal obesity was associated with adverse cardiometabolic outcomes in offspring, including higher BMI, blood pressure, and insulin levels. Comparison: Both studies highlight the detrimental effects of maternal obesity on offspring health, particularly in relation to metabolic and cardiovascular outcomes. [3,6]

Reynolds et al., 2013: This retrospective cohort study investigated the long-term consequences of maternal obesity and gestational diabetes on offspring health. Results indicated an increased risk of premature mortality from cardiovascular events in adult offspring of obese mothers. Comparison: While both studies underscore the long-term health implications of maternal obesity, Reynolds et al. focused on cardiovascular outcomes in adulthood, whereas our study examines a broader range of health outcomes across childhood and adolescence [2,7,8].

Catalano and Shankar, 2017: This review article synthesized evidence on the mechanisms underlying the association between maternal obesity and adverse offspring health outcomes. Key mechanisms discussed include intrauterine programming of metabolic abnormalities, altered placental function, and epigenetic modifications. Comparison: While our study provides empirical evidence of the association between maternal obesity and offspring health outcomes, Catalano and Shankar's review offers valuable insights into the underlying biological pathways [1,9,10].

Lawlor et al., 2008: This study investigated the developmental overnutrition hypothesis, suggesting that maternal obesity may program offspring for obesity and related health issues. Findings supported the hypothesis, demonstrating associations between maternal obesity and offspring adiposity and metabolic abnormalities. Comparison: Both studies contribute to understanding the concept of developmental programming and highlight the role of maternal obesity in shaping offspring health trajectories [7,11,12].

In comparison to these previous studies, our retrospective cohort study adds to the growing body of evidence supporting the adverse effects of maternal obesity on offspring health outcomes [13]. Specifically, our study provides empirical evidence of associations between maternal obesity and adverse birth outcomes, childhood growth trajectories, and long-term health outcomes in offspring. By adjusting for potential confounders, our study strengthens the evidence base and emphasizes the importance of addressing maternal obesity as a public health priority to improve the health and well-being of future generations [14].

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of addressing maternal obesity as a modifiable risk factor to improve offspring health outcomes. Interventions aimed at reducing obesity prevalence among women of childbearing age and optimizing maternal health before and during pregnancy may mitigate the adverse effects of maternal obesity on offspring health. Furthermore, longitudinal studies

are needed to better understand the mechanisms underlying the observed associations and to develop targeted interventions to break the cycle of intergenerational obesity and its associated health consequences.

### **Conclusion:**

Our retrospective cohort study provides compelling evidence of the significant impact of maternal obesity on offspring health outcomes. Through comprehensive analysis of maternal characteristics, birth outcomes, childhood growth trajectories, and long-term health outcomes, we have elucidated the adverse effects of maternal obesity across the lifespan of the offspring. Our findings underscore the importance of addressing maternal obesity as a modifiable risk factor to improve the health and well-being of future generations. Interventions aimed at reducing obesity prevalence among women of childbearing age and optimizing maternal health before and during pregnancy are crucial for mitigating the intergenerational transmission of obesity and its associated health consequences. Furthermore, our study highlights the need for continued research to further elucidate the underlying mechanisms linking maternal obesity to adverse offspring health outcomes and to develop targeted interventions to break the cycle of intergenerational obesity. By addressing maternal obesity, we can promote healthier pregnancies, improve neonatal and childhood outcomes, and ultimately enhance the long-term health trajectories of future generations.

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