

BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF FASTING IN RAMADAN AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Background: Fasting in the Holy month of Ramadan is compulsory in Islam. The objective of study was to explore the pregnant women's beliefs and practices about fasting in Ramadan during pregnancy.

Material & Methods: This explorative study was conducted in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan, after Ramadan from September 2016 to November 2016. 150 females constituted our sample size, using convenient sampling technique. Women who have undergone pregnancy in last Ramadan was the inclusion criteria. Non-muslim females were excluded. Demographic variables were age, parity, Gestational age, level of education, ethnicity and SES. Research variables were whether they fast during Ramadan, number of days they fast, experiences during the fasting, beliefs of fasting during pregnancy & harm of fasting. Chi-square test was used to analyze the association between different variables and fasting during pregnancy with p-value <0.005 considering statistically significant.

Results: Out of a total of 150 women, 54% fast during pregnancy in Ramadan. 38% believed fasting as 'essential' during pregnancy. 70% who fast during pregnancy think fasting during pregnancy has no harm to themselves and their children. When fasting was cross tabulated with gestational age, level of education and ethnicity the results were found to be statistically significant (P-value <0.05).

Conclusion: Our Muslim women know not much about the physiological aspects of fasting during pregnancy. After identifying their beliefs and practices health provider need to help them out in a better way of safety of fasting during pregnancy.

KEY WORDS: Ramadan; Pregnancy; Fasting; Women.

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INTRODUCTION

Al Quran: "O Believers! The fast has been prescribed upon you just as it was prescribed for the followers of the Prophets before you, so that you may attain Taqwa (piety)".¹

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. Ramadan is followed on lunar calendar, it may come in any month or season in a year approximately lasting between 12 and 19 hours per day² Every year millions of Muslims fast worldwide, they forbid eating, drinking and smoking

from sunrise till sunset. Fasting in Ramadan during pregnancy is debatable, Some Muslim women do not fast during pregnancy for the safety of their children's health but feel guilty of not obeying religious beliefs. Some pregnant women do fast to cherish religious principles irrespective of child's health.³ According to Al Quran "but, If any of you is ill or on a journey, the same number (should be made up) from other days"⁴ Islam is the religion of helping mankind.

Different studies have reported the metabolic changes and their effects on maternal and fetal health during and after Ramadan.^{5,6} But other studies say there is not any significant adverse effect of fasting on neither maternal or fetal health.^{7,8}

Women of Pakistan live in a male dominant society and where gender-based subordination has been ingrained in mind of both men and women. There is strong gender influences on women education and uneven socioeconomic development in women's lives.^{9,10} The pregnant woman with her husband has been kept out of decision making processes of her pregnancy associated issues by family

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older women of the family. Thus results the maternal malnutrition and poor pregnancy outcome.^{11,12}

In the background of Pakistani women's nutritional status and their social values it seems to be worthy to make them aware of their safety during fasting but need to know their own beliefs about fasting in Ramadan. The objective of study was to explore the pregnant women's beliefs and practices about fasting in Ramadan during pregnancy.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This explorative study was conducted in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Dow University of Health Sciences, Karachi, Pakistan, after Ramadan from September 2016 to November 2016. One hundred and fifty females constituted our sample size, using convenient sampling technique. Women who have undergone pregnancy in last Ramadan and attending the antenatal and postnatal clinics after Ramadan was the inclusion criteria. Non muslims females were excluded. The data was collected on a questionnaire.¹³ An informed verbal consent was taken to participate in the study. Questionnaire was translated in Urdu by researchers but for language barrier translator was arranged. Demographic variables were age (<20, 20-35 & >35 years), parity (primigravida, 2-5 & >5), Gestational age (1st, 2nd & 3rd semesters) level of education (uneducated, Matric, inter, graduate & post graduate), ethnicity (Urdu, Punjabi, Pathan, Sindhi, Baloch & Memon) and socioeconomic status (upper middle, lower middle & lower). Research variables were whether they fast during Ramadan (yes, no), number of days they fast (whole month, on alternate days and on special days), experiences during the fasting (weakness, thirst, nausea / vomiting, no any complaints), beliefs of fasting during pregnancy (essential, recommended, optional, Don't know), harm of fasting (to themselves, to babies, no harm and don't know). Data was collected, entered and analyzed by using SPSS version 16.0.

Frequencies were tabulated for demographic characteristics and their relation to fasting and their beliefs. Cross tabulation was used to analyze the association between different variables and fasting during pregnancy. Chi-square test was used to analyze the association with p-value <0.005 considering statistically significant.

RESULTS

Out of a total of 150 women 81 (54%) fast during pregnancy in Ramadan. Forty five (56%) fast for whole month, 12 (14%) fast on alternate days and 24 (30%) prefer to fast on special days like weekends or holidays during Ramadan. During their fasting 24 (30%) experienced weakness, 18 (22%) felt thirsty, 12 (15%) had excessive nausea and vomiting while 27 (33%) had no any complaints. While overall 90 (60%)

of participants found difficult to fast during pregnancy whether they had practiced or not. Demographic-wise distribution of fasting is given in (Table 1).

Regarding participant's beliefs 57 (38%) believed fasting as 'essential' during pregnancy while 75 (50%) believed fasting to be an 'optional' during pregnancy (Table 2).

Table 2: Belief of fasting during pregnancy (n=150).

Fasting in pregnancy	Count with percentage
Essential	57(38%)
Recommended	15(10%)
Optional	75(50%)
Don't know	3(2%)

Is fasting harmful for pregnancy? when asked, the majority of 84 (56%) women and within them 57 (70%) who fast during pregnancy think fasting during pregnancy has no harm to themselves and their children (Table 3).

Table 3: Harm of fasting on pregnancy.

Harm of fasting	Frequency N=150 N(%)	Fast Yes N=81 N(%)	Fast No N=69 N(%)
To your own health	21(14%)	9(42.8%)	12(57.1%)
To your baby	6(4%)	0	6(100%)
Both get harm	36(24%)	15(41.6%)	21(58.3%)
No harm	84(56%)	57(67.8%)	27(32.1%)
Don't know	3(2%)	0	3(100%)

Among all 69 (46%) women exempted themselves from fasting and collectively 39 (57%) of them thought fasting in pregnancy is harmful for themselves and their babies. Feeling weakness 39 (57%) and only some of them 9 (13%) had family pressure as a reasons for not to fast during pregnancy (Table 4).

Table 4: Reasons for not fasting in pregnancy.

Why not fast	Not fast N=69 N(%)
Feeling weakness	39(56%)
Family pressure	9(13%)
Pregnancy itself	9(13%)
Medical Diseases	12(17%)

Table 1: Demographic characteristics with fasting

CHARACTERISTICS	FREQUENCY N=150 N(%)	FASTING YES N=81 (54%) N(%)	FASTING NO N=69(46%) N(%)	P-VALUE
Age				
Below 20 years	18(12%)	9(50%)	9(50%)	NS
20-35 Years	117(78%)	63(54%)	54(46%)	
>35 Years	15(10%)	9(60%)	6(40%)	
Parity				
Primigravida	66(44%)	33(50%)	33(50%)	NS
2-5	78(52%)	48(62%)	30(38%)	
>5	6(4%)	0	6(100%)	
Gestation				
1St trimester	27(18%)	23(85%)	4(14.8%)	0.000*
2Nd trimester	33(22%)	28(84.8%)	5(15%)	
3Rd t rimester	90(60%)	30(33.3%)	60(66.6%)	
Level of education				
Uneducated	12(8%)	1(8.3%)	11(91.6%)	0.001*
Metric	31(20.6%)	24(77%)	7(23%)	
Intermediate	50(33.3%)	26(50%)	24(48%)	
Graduate	51(34%)	26(50.9%)	25(49%)	
Post graduate	6(4%)	4(66.6%)	2(33.3%)	
Socioeconomic status				
Upper middle	84(56%)	54(64%)	30(36%)	NS
Lower middle	63(42%)	27(43%)	36(57%)	
Lower	3(2%)	0	3(100%)	
Ethnicity				
Urdu speaking	87(58%)	48(55.1%)	39(44.8%)	0.030*
Punjabi	18(12%)	9(50%)	9(50%)	
Pathan	15(10%)	15(100%)	0	
Sindhi	18(12%)	0	18(100%)	
Baloch	3(2%)	3(100%)	0	
Memon	9(6%)	6(66.6%)	3(33.3%)	

When fasting was cross tabulated with gestational age, level of education and ethnicity the results were found to be statistically significant (P-value <0.05).

DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to identify the beliefs and practices of fasting during pregnancy in the Holy month of Ramadan. In this study 56% of women fast during pregnancy but only 14% belief to be harmful for themselves and 24% for both mother and baby. In contrary in a study conducted in Iran by Firouzbakht . et al in 2013 reported 31.8% pregnant women fast during Ramadan and 34% believed to be harmful for

mother and 66% believed fasting harmful for baby.¹⁴ Similarly high rates of fasting practices among Muslims during pregnancy were also reported in other studies.^{15,16}

In this study 38% of women beliefs fasting during pregnancy as 'essential' while 50% as 'optional'. Weakness in 30% and feeling thirsty in 22% was experienced by women who fast during pregnancy. In a study conducted in Pakistan in 2012 by Mubeen SM 88% believed fasting as 'essential'. Weakness in 25% and feeling thirsty in 26.5% were the main symptoms experienced during fasting.¹³

Another study was done on Muslim women living in Singapore in 2004 by Joosoph stated majority

of 87% fasted only at least one day and 25% stated that fasting is difficult during pregnancy, whereas in present study 56% women fasted for whole month of Ramadan and about 60% felt difficult to fast during pregnancy.¹⁷ In a recent quantitative study on Somali and Bangladeshi Muslim females reported that positive health effects of fasting outweighed any negative effects about health. The study also highlighted a strong spiritual affirmation for fasting during Ramadan.¹⁸ This study showed statistically significant result when fasting cross tabulated with gestation, level of education and ethnicity, which is also reported in another study conducted in Pakistan in 2012 but ethnicity was not considered.⁽¹³⁾

CONCLUSION

Our Muslim women knows not much about the physiological aspects of fasting during pregnancy. After Identifying their beliefs and practices health provider need to help them out in a better way of safety of fasting during pregnancy.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare no conflict of interest.
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None declared.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Conception and Design:	UN, RT
Data collection, analysis & interpretation:	UN, SR, SR
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