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Emotions During Pregnancy: Do They Protect From the Risk of Dysregulated Eating Behaviors?

G. De Campora¹, V. Guerriero¹, M.R. Magliano¹, C. Meldolesi², A.M. Delogu¹, R. Tambelli¹

¹Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, Italy ; ²OBGYN Department, Fatebenefratelli San Pietro Hospital, Rome, Italy

Introduction. Pregnancy represents a critical life stage for its physical and emotional changes. Maternal thoughts are often oriented to the worry to lose control on their body, and to their new physical shape. According to this, literature on eating disorder (ED) highlights how pregnancy is usually associated to a temporary interruption of the dysfunctional eating habits due to the move of concerns about the self and the body toward the caregiving of the baby.

Aim. The goal of the present study is to explore the impact of generalized difficulties in emotion regulation (as a stable trait) versus specific difficulties in emotion regulation (as pregnancy-related) in women with pre-pregnancy eating problems.

Method. The sample is made by 15 women previously overweight and recruited during their 3rd trimester of pregnancy. The following measures were administered: Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS), Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26), Emotional Difficulties Specific to Pregnancy Scale (EDS), and the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI).

Results. Preliminary findings have shown how higher scores on the DERS Impulse scale as well as higher difficulties in handling emotional states related to pregnancy (e.g. fear of the delivery) are associated to the existence of dysfunctional eating behaviors during the 3rd trimester.

Conclusions. Emotion regulation has emerged as a transversal skill during the life cycle. Difficulties in this area seem to represent a stable trait in the individual functioning, with the risk to affect the eating behaviors, as well as the health of the mother and the baby during pregnancy.