Higher Gravidity and Parity Are Associated with Increased Prevalence of Metabolic Syndrome among Rural Bangladeshi Women

Shamima Akter, Subrina Jesmin, Md. Mizanur Rahman, Md. Majedul Islam, Most. Tanzila Khatun, Naoto Yamaguchi, Hidechika Akashi, Taro Mizutani

1 Health & Disease Research Center for Rural Peoples (HDRCRP), 14/15, Probol Housing Ltd., Mohammadpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2 Graduate School of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Ibaraki, Japan, 3 National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM), Toyama, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, Japan, 4 Department of Global Health Policy, University of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan

Abstract

Background: Parity increases the risk for coronary heart disease; however, its association with metabolic syndrome among women in low-income countries is still unknown.

Objective: This study investigates the association between parity or gravidity and metabolic syndrome in rural Bangladeshi women.

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted in 1,219 women aged 15–75 years from rural Bangladesh. Metabolic syndrome was defined according to the standard NCEP-ATP III criteria. Logistic regression was used to estimate the association between parity and gravidity and metabolic syndrome, with adjustment of potential confounding variables.

Results: Subjects with the highest gravidity (> = 4) had 1.66 times higher odds of having metabolic syndrome compared to those in the lowest gravidity (0-1) ($P_{trend} = 0.02$). A similar association was found between parity and metabolic syndrome ($P_{trend} = 0.04$), i.e., subjects in the highest parity (> = 4) had 1.65 times higher odds of having metabolic syndrome compared to those in the lowest parity (0-1). This positive association of parity and gravidity with metabolic syndrome was confined to pre-menopausal women ($P_{trend} <0.01$). Among the components of metabolic syndrome only high blood pressure showed positive association with parity and gravidity ($P_{trend} = 0.01$ and <0.001). Neither Parity nor gravidity was appreciably associated with other components of metabolic syndrome.

Conclusions: Multi parity or gravidity may be a risk factor for metabolic syndrome.

Introduction

The prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCD) has significantly increased world-wide [1], with a sharp rise in low-income countries, where infectious diseases remain a significant problem [2]. This problem is particularly pronounced in South Asian populations, which have a much higher prevalence of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease that occur at an earlier age and is associated with high premature mortalities [3]. Metabolic syndrome is a combination of intermediate risk factors, including obesity, glucose intolerance, insulin resistance, dyslipidemia and hypertension, which in turn predisposes individuals to risks associated with cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes by two- to threefold and three- to five fold, respectively [4–6]. Understanding potential relationships of reproductive conditions and history with metabolic syndrome may help to identify and alleviate high-risk individuals and those with early or established diseases.

Pregnancy and child bearing are timed physiological conditions. However, there is some evidence that these two conditions may have a long-term impact on the health of women. For instance, it is generally assumed that pregnancy...
associated insulin resistance resolves after parturition, but subtle metabolic changes could persist [7–9]. According to a systematic review of epidemiologic evidence, it has been shown that having a high number of reproductive events increases a woman’s risk of developing cardiovascular disease [10]. Nonetheless, evidence regarding the association between reproductive events and the prevalence of diabetes mellitus is inconsistent. For this reason, it is of interest to investigate the association of parity or gravidity with metabolic syndrome.

To date, a few studies have investigated the association between parity and metabolic syndrome and found a positive association between parity and metabolic syndrome [11–14]. However, these studies are mainly from the West [11,12], Middle East [14], and East Asian populations [13]. Surprisingly, there has been no report on this issue from South Asia, where the population is more prone to metabolic syndrome and its components in Bangladeshi women. We hypothesized that higher parity or gravidity is positively associated with metabolic syndrome after controlling for socio-demographic, lifestyle and reproductive factors.

Table 1. Baseline characteristics and cardio-metabolic risk factors by parity.

| Number of live births | (0-1) | 2 | 3 | 4 | Trend P<sup>b</sup> |
|-----------------------|-------|---|---|---|---------------------|
| N                     | 285   | 389| 281| 264|                     |
| Age (years)           | 29.79 ± 11.76<sup>a</sup> | 34.27 ± 10.36 | 41.02 ± 10.33 | 45.85 ± 11.01 | <0.001 |
| Education (illiterate, %) | 35.79 | 43.44 | 56.94 | 60.61 | <0.001 |
| Ever use of contraceptives (%) | 16.84 | 21.85 | 19.22 | 11.74 | 0.07 |
| Currently married (%) | 92.28 | 92.8 | 89.32 | 86.74 | 0.041 |
| Use of tobacco products (ever, %) | 9.12 | 17.48 | 19.93 | 22.73 | <0.001 |
| BMI (kg/m<sup>2</sup>) | 21.94 ± 3.95 | 22.39 ± 3.86 | 22.29 ± 3.91 | 21.62 ± 4.16 | 0.30 |
| Age at first pregnancy (years) | 16.43 ± 7.99 | 18 ± 2.58 | 17.46 ± 2.46 | 17.99 ± 1.85 | 0.001 |
| Age at menarche (years) | 11.93 ± 1.1 | 11.9 ± 1.01 | 11.95 ± 2.13 | 11.79 ± 0.92 | 0.34 |
| Waist circumference (cm) | 75.66 ± 8.79 | 78.46 ± 8.78 | 77.54 ± 8.07 | 77.11 ± 8.53 | 0.18 |
| Fasting blood glucose (mmol/L) | 5.65 ± 1.64 | 5.87 ± 2.48 | 6.12 ± 2.06 | 6.28 ± 2.62 | <0.001 |
| Triglyceride (mg/dL) | 113.88 ± 81.7 | 115.02 ± 83.31 | 132.32 ± 134.54 | 140.93 ± 98.84 | <0.001 |
| HDL cholesterol (mg/dL) | 36.99 ± 14.11 | 36.73 ± 14.2 | 38.72 ± 19.39 | 41.38 ± 27.72 | 0.003 |
| Systolic blood pressure (mmHg) | 109.5 ± 17.93 | 112.22 ± 17.78 | 116.01 ± 20.29 | 121.04 ± 22.46 | <0.001 |
| Diastolic blood pressure (mmHg) | 72.23 ± 10.05 | 73.38 ± 9.32 | 74.85 ± 9.34 | 76.97 ± 10.14 | <0.001 |

Abbreviation: BMI, body mass index; HDL, high-density lipoprotein
<sup>a</sup>Values are means±SD, all such values.
<sup>b</sup>On the basis of Mantel-Haenszel chi-square test for categorical variables and linear regression analysis for continuous variables, assigning ordinal numbers 1-4 to increasing numbers of children.

Data and Methods

Study Procedure and Subjects

This cross-sectional study is a community-based study conducted on women from rural Bangladesh in 2009-2010. A total of 1535 women aged 15-70 years were selected using the stratified multistage random sampling. We used the World Health Organization’s (WHO) STEPS approach (modified), which entails a stepwise collection of the risk factor data, based on standardized questionnaires covering the following parameters: demographic characteristics, somatic illnesses, somatic and mental symptoms, medications, life style, and health-related behavior (step 1), basic physical measures (step 2) and basic biochemical investigations, such as blood glucose and cholesterol (step 3). The women were recruited from 4 village communities located in Gabindagonj Upazilla (subdistrict) of Gaibandha district. After the communities were picked (division, district, Upazilla and villages), the respondents were then selected randomly. The details of the study procedure and study area have been described elsewhere [16,18]. In brief, data from participants were obtained through interviews and clinical examinations at mobile examination centers, where blood samples were also collected. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Health and Disease Research Center of Rural Peoples (HDRCRP), Dhaka, Bangladesh, and conforms to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration. All subjects gave their written informed consent prior to participation. In case of subjects below 18 years of age, a written informed consent was obtained from guardians on the behalf of the young participants involved in this study and the ethics committees approve this consent procedure. Prior to the survey, our enumerator carefully read
the consent form to the subject and then very briefly explained the aims and importance of the study. This consent form contained information on the objectives of the study, risks, benefits and freedom of participation, and confidentiality.

Out of the total 1535 women, we excluded subjects with missing information on triglyceride, high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol and fasting blood glucose. We further excluded subjects with missing information on parity, gravidity, or missing information for any of the covariates used in the main analysis. After all these exclusions, the final number of women who remained in the study was 1219 subjects.

**Anthropometric and Other Variables**

Anthropometric measurements on individuals wearing light clothing and without shoes, were conducted by well-trained examiners, as described here: height was measured to the nearest 0.1 cm using the portable stadiometer; weight was measured in an upright position, to the nearest 0.1 kg, using a calibrated balance beam scale; body mass index (BMI) was calculated as the body weight (kg) divided by the square of the body height (m²); and waist circumference measurements were taken at the end of normal expiration, to the nearest 0.1 cm, by measuring from the narrowest point between the lower borders of the rib cage and the iliac crest; blood pressure was measured twice in the right arm in a sitting position using the standard mercury manometer and cuff, to the nearest 2 mmHg, with the initial reading taken at least 5 minutes after the subject was made comfortable, and again after an interval of 15 minutes. The average systolic and diastolic blood pressures were then estimated. Tobacco use, marital status, use of contraceptives, menopausal status, and experience of pregnancy or number of live births were self-reported. Ever tobacco users were defined as one who was current tobacco users (smoked/chewed tobacco) and who had not smoked/chewed tobacco in the past 30 days preceding the survey but had tried in the past. In this study, women were categorized as post-menopausal if their last menses was at least 12 months prior to the study; pre-menopausal if they had an unchanged and regular menstrual pattern during the last five years, without typical climacteric complaints.

**Biochemical Analysis**

Blood for biochemical analysis was obtained from the participants after a 10-12 hour overnight fast. The blood samples were collected using the standard blood sample collection procedure. Immediately after collection of blood and labeling the blood vials, the samples were transported to the National Center for Global Health and Medicine (NCGM), Japan, for biochemical assessment. For analysis, the serum was immediately separated from the blood by centrifugation for in order to evaluate plasma concentration of lipids. Triglyceride levels were measured by lipoprotein lipase method (Wako Chemicals, Tokyo, Japan), HDL cholesterol was measured with the Determiner-L kit (Kyowa Co Ltd, Tokyo, Japan). Fasting plasma glucose levels were measured with the Hexokinase G-6-PDH kit (Wako Pure Chemical Industries Ltd, Osaka, Japan).

**Assessment of Gravidity or Parity**

Our main parameter is gravidity or parity of women. Gravidity is defined as the number of pregnancies, including lost pregnancies, due to stillbirths, whereas parity refers to the number of biological live births. This information was obtained by personal interviews at the time of the survey. These questions were conducted in an open-ended form, e.g., “how many live births have you had?” or “how many times have you

| Number of gravidity | (0-1) | 2 | > = 4 | Trend P |
|---------------------|------|---|-------|---------|
| Central obesity (WC≥ 88 cm) | | | | |
| Unadjusted | 1.00 | 1.81 (1.04–3.17) | 1.46 (0.80–2.69) | 1.27 (0.69–2.35) | 0.82 |
| Multivariable adjusted* | 1.00 | 1.54 (0.79–2.99) | 1.10 (0.51–2.36) | 1.18 (0.54–2.59) | 0.89 |
| High fasting blood Glucose (≥110 mg/dL) | | | | |
| Unadjusted | 1.00 | 0.95 (0.66–1.37) | 1.42 (0.97–2.07) | 1.90 (1.31–2.74) | <0.001 |
| Multivariable adjusted* | 1.00 | 0.78 (0.52–1.16) | 1.05 (0.68–1.63) | 1.26 (0.81–1.95) | 0.15 |
| High triglyceride (≥150 mg/dL) | | | | |
| Unadjusted | 1.00 | 1.22 (0.84–1.78) | 1.34 (0.90–1.99) | 1.85 (1.27–2.71) | <0.001 |
| Multivariable adjusted* | 1.00 | 1.05 (0.71–1.55) | 0.98 (0.63–1.52) | 1.33 (0.86–2.04) | 0.23 |
| Low HDL cholesterol (<50 mg/dL) | | | | |
| Unadjusted | 1.00 | 1.42 (0.86–2.33) | 0.98 (0.59–1.62) | 0.73 (0.45–1.17) | 0.07 |
| Multivariable adjusted* | 1.00 | 1.48 (0.89–2.47) | 1.12 (0.67–1.86) | 0.88 (0.52–1.48) | 0.32 |
| High blood pressure (≥ 130|≥85 mm Hg) | | | | |
| Unadjusted | 1.00 | 1.57 (1.01–2.48) | 2.72 (1.73–4.26) | 4.08 (2.64–6.31) | <0.001 |
| Multivariable adjusted* | 1.00 | 1.24 (0.77–2.00) | 1.66 (1.02–2.72) | 2.09 (1.28–3.43) | 0.01 |

* Adjusted for age (year, continuous), BMI (kg/m², continuous), marital status(currently married or others), tobacco users (ever or never), use of contraceptives (ever or never), education (illiterate, have formal education), age at first pregnancy (year, continuous).

* Based on multiple logistic regression analysis, with ordinal numbers 1-4 assigned to increasing numbers of gravidity or parity.

### Table 2. Odds ratio (95% confidence interval) for each component of metabolic syndrome according to gravidity.
been pregnant, including pregnancies that ended up in miscarriage or still births?” For data analysis of the present study, parity or gravidity was categorized into four groups (0-1, 2, 3 and ≥ 4). In the present study only 3.69% of our subjects were nulliparous women. Therefore, we choose to group 0 and 1 live birth into one category and considered this category as the reference or baseline category.

Definition of Metabolic Syndrome and Risk Factors

Metabolic syndrome and metabolic risk factors were defined according to the standard criteria of the National Cholesterol Education Program’s Adults Treatment Panel III (NCEP-ATP III) [19]. Three or more of the following components constituted metabolic syndrome: a) abdominal obesity, as measured by a waist circumference of ≥ 88 cm for women and ≥ 94 cm for men; b) high fasting blood glucose (≥110 mg/dL or ≥6.1 mmol/L) or patients diagnosed with diabetes; c) high triglycerides (≥150 mg/dL or ≥1.7 mmol/L); d) low HDL cholesterol (<50 mg/dL or <1.29 mmol/L); e) and high blood pressure (≥130/≥85 mmHg). Also, participants who at the time of the study reported to be on anti-hypertensive or anti-diabetic medications (insulin or oral agents) were considered to have high blood pressure or high fasting blood glucose, respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Characteristics of the study participants were presented based on the order of the parity number. Trend association of demographic and reproductive parameters and cardiovascular risk factor by parity were assessed using linear regression analysis for continuous variables or Mantel-Haenszel chi-square test for categorical variables, with ordinal numbers 1-4 assigned to increasing categories of parity.

To evaluate the magnitude of the association of parity and gravidity with metabolic syndrome and its components (obesity, high triglycerides, low HDL cholesterol, high blood pressure, and high fasting blood glucose), we estimated adjusted odds ratio (OR) and 95% confidence interval with multivariable logistic regression models. The first models were unadjusted. The second models were adjusted for age (year, continuous), BMI (kg/m², continuous), education (illiterate, had formal education), marital status (currently married or others), tobacco users (ever or never), use of contraceptives (ever or never), and age at first pregnancy (year, continuous). Similarly, we examined the association between parity and metabolic syndrome and its components, according to the menopausal status (pre-menopause and post-menopause), since menopause is known as an important risk factor for metabolic syndrome. The P for interaction was assessed using likelihood ratio test comparing models with or without interaction terms for the interaction between parity and menopausal status. Trend association was assessed by assigning ordinal numbers 1-4 to increasing numbers of parity or gravidity. Two-sided P values <0.05 were regarded as statistically significant. All analyses were performed using statistical software STATA version 12.0 (Lakeway Drive, College Station, Texas, USA).

Results

Table 1, which shows the characteristics of the study subjects based on parity, reveals that subjects with higher parity were more likely to have no formal education and were tobacco users, but less likely to be currently married. Parity was positively associated with current age, fasting blood glucose, triglyceride, HDL cholesterol, systolic blood pressure and diastolic blood pressure.

Table 2 shows odds ratio of the components of metabolic syndrome, according to increasing categories of gravity. Gravity was positively associated with prevalence of high blood pressure both in unadjusted and multivariable adjusted model (P for trend = 0.01 and < 0.01, respectively). In multivariable adjusted model, compared to the lowest gravity group (0-1), subjects with the highest gravity (≥4) had 2.09 times higher odds of having high blood pressure. Table 3 shows odds ratio of the components of metabolic syndrome, according to increasing categories of parity. Likewise for gravity, similar associations were found between parity and high blood pressure. Compared to lowest parity (0-1), subjects with highest parity had 1.96 times higher odds of prevalence of high blood pressure in multivariable adjusted model. Although both gravity and parity were positively associated with high fasting blood glucose and high triglyceride in unadjusted model. Although both gravity and parity were positively associated with high fasting blood glucose and high triglyceride in unadjusted model (P for trend <0.01 for both), the association disappeared after adjusting for other covariates, including demographic and lifestyle factors. Neither parity nor gravidity was associated with central obesity and low HDL cholesterol both in unadjusted and multivariable adjusted model.

Table 4 shows odds ratio of prevalence of metabolic syndrome across increasing categories of gravity and parity. Both parity and gravidity were positively associated with metabolic syndrome in unadjusted model (P for trend < 0.01), and additional adjustment for demographic and lifestyle factors somewhat attenuate the association. However, the association still remained significant (P for trend < 0.05). Subjects with the highest gravity had 1.66 times higher odds of having metabolic syndrome than those in the lowest gravity in multivariable adjusted model (P for trend = 0.02). Similarly, subjects with the highest parity had 1.65 times higher odds of having metabolic syndrome than subjects with the lowest parity (P for trend = 0.04).

In multivariate logistic regression analyses, including the number of gravidity as a continuous variable, gravidity was significantly and positively associated with metabolic syndrome (odds ratio = 1.13, P = 0.04). When we considered the number of parity as a continuous variable, similar significant and positive association was found between parity and metabolic syndrome (odds ratio = 1.18, P = 0.03) (data not shown in Table).

Results of stratified analysis, according to menopausal status (pre-menopause or post-menopause), are presented in Table 5. The interaction between the number of parity and metabolic syndrome for menopausal women shows statistically significant results (P for interaction = 0.009). The number of parity was positively associated with metabolic syndrome only among pre-
menopausal women (P for trend <0.01), but not among post-menopausal women (P for trend = 0.32).

Discussion

In the present cross-sectional study of Bangladeshi rural women, we found that the number of parity or gravidity was positively associated with metabolic syndrome after adjusting for socio-demographic, lifestyle and reproductive factors. This positive association was confined to pre-menopausal women. In addition, we also observed that of the components of metabolic syndrome, only high blood pressure shows significant positive association with the number of parity or gravidity in a multivariable adjusted model. To our knowledge, this is the first study in a South Asian population (Bangladesh), as well as from a low-income community, to address the association between parity or gravidity and metabolic syndrome.

The significant positive association between parity or gravidity and metabolic syndrome in our study is consistent with most of the previous studies [11–14]. For instance, higher parity or gravidity was positively associated with a higher prevalence of metabolic syndrome in a cross-sectional study among older Chinese women [13]. In addition, parity was positively associated with a higher prevalence of succumbing to the metabolic syndrome in an Iranian study [14]. Further, in a US study, the number of children was found to be positively associated with metabolic syndrome among post-menopausal women (age >50 years), where most of them may have been post-menopausal. We have no plausible reason for the significant positive association between parity or gravidity and metabolic syndrome’s existence only among pre-menopausal women in the present study, but it may be possible that other physiological changes among post-menopausal women, i.e. natural ovarian failure associated with estrogen deficiency that comes with age, may have attenuated the actual association between higher parity and metabolic syndrome among post-menopausal women.

In the present study both parity and gravidity were found to be positively associated with high blood pressure. The results of our present study are in line with those of some previous studies, where higher parity was positively associated with systolic blood pressures [20,21]. However, contrary to the present findings, most of the previous studies [11,13,14] found no clear association between parity and high blood pressure. Moreover, in a US study, gravidity was inversely associated with hypertension among both pre- and post-menopausal women [22]. In contrast, in an Italian study [23], parity was demonstrated to be independently associated with early hypertension during menopausal transition, but post-menopausal hypertension was not related with parity. In the stratified analysis of the current study, based on menopausal status, we found that parity was positively associated high

### Table 3. Odds ratio (95% confidence interval) for each component of metabolic syndrome according to parity.

| Number of parity | 0-1 | 2 | > = 4 | Trend P |
|------------------|-----|---|-------|---------|
| Central obesity (WC ≥ 88 cm) | | | | |
| Unadjusted       | 1.00| 1.81 (1.06–3.10) | 1.39 (0.77–2.51) | 1.14 (0.61–2.13) | 0.96 |
| Multivariable adjusted | 1.00| 1.48 (0.80–2.75) | 1.07 (0.52–2.19) | 1.01 (0.47–2.16) | 0.66 |
| High fasting blood glucose (≥110 mg/dL) | | | | |
| Unadjusted       | 1.00| 0.97 (0.68–1.39) | 1.68 (1.16–2.42) | 1.73 (1.20–2.51) | <0.001 |
| Multivariable adjusted | 1.00| 0.86 (0.58–1.27) | 1.27 (0.83–1.95) | 1.24 (0.80–1.93) | 0.12 |
| High triglyceride (≥150 mg/dL) | | | | |
| Unadjusted       | 1.00| 1.18 (0.82–1.70) | 1.33 (0.91–1.96) | 1.89 (1.29–2.76) | <0.001 |
| Multivariable adjusted | 1.00| 1.00 (0.68–1.48) | 0.96 (0.63–1.48) | 1.38 (0.90–2.11) | 0.16 |
| Low HDL cholesterol (<50 mg/dL) | | | | |
| Unadjusted       | 1.00| 1.46 (0.90–2.37) | 1.01 (0.62–1.65) | 0.79 (0.49–1.27) | 0.16 |
| Multivariable adjusted | 1.00| 1.51 (0.92–2.49) | 1.19 (0.70–2.00) | 0.94 (0.55–1.60) | 0.54 |
| High blood pressure (≥130/≥85 mm Hg) | | | | |
| Unadjusted       | 1.00| 1.48 (0.96–2.28) | 2.87 (1.87–4.39) | 3.42 (2.23–5.23) | <0.001 |
| Multivariable adjusted | 1.00| 1.30 (0.81–2.08) | 1.82 (1.13–2.92) | 1.96 (1.19–3.21) | <0.001 |

* Adjusted for age (year, continuous), BMI (kg/m², continuous), marital status (currently married or others), tobacco users (ever or never), use of contraceptives (ever or never), education (illiterate, have formal education), age at first pregnancy (year, continuous).

* Based on multiple logistic regression analysis, with ordinal numbers 1-4 assigned to increasing numbers of gravidity or parity.
were much more obese [13,22], compared to our present study. It is important to note again that subjects of the present studies reporting a significant positive association [13,14], inconsistent data, previous studies have suggested that the relationship between parity and high triglycerides, low HDL cholesterol and elevated waist circumference [11,13,14]. In the face of these inconsistent data, previous studies have suggested that the observed relationships between parity and lipids are confounded or mediated by other factors, such as body weight and socio-economic status. Large prospective studies are needed to elucidate the inconsistencies in these findings.

Several biological mechanisms and lifestyle factors for the observed positive association between parity and metabolic syndrome have been suggested. First, it has been proposed that every pregnancy permanently resets ovarian function, which ultimately leads to a reduced lifetime exposure to estrogen [24] and, therefore, metabolic syndrome. Secondly, as normal pregnancy is similar to a state of insulin resistance, frequent pregnancies may result in permanent detrimental effect on lipid and glucose metabolisms [7,25,26]. Thirdly, repeated pregnancies cause excess gain in weight, weight variability or weight cycling [27,28], and will led to greater upper fat distribution and a higher prevalence of metabolic syndrome [29,30]. Finally, pregnancy and child bearing could result in subtle changes in life style and factors such as stress may not be readily measured using biological assays [31].

The major strengths of the present study include the following: a) It is a community-based survey drawn from the general population; b) the anthropometric data are generated from measurements rather than self-reporting, which is less precise; c) potential confounding variables were accounted for;
d) and comparisons and associations between two birth outcomes (pregnancy or parity) and metabolic syndrome in women were examined. Despite these strengths, our study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the self-reporting of pregnancies or births may not have been reliable, likely due to recall errors. Secondly, subjects may not have been aware of or correctly recall pregnancy losses or miscarriages. However, live births are more likely to be recalled accurately than pregnancies. It is important to note that because of the similarity in results and association examined by pregnancies and births, it is likely that recall errors did not have substantially biased our results. Thirdly, although we adjusted for important confounders, the possibility of residual confounding cannot be ruled out. Finally, our study is cross-sectional and could have selection biases during case recruitment because we only examined rural women from a lower socio-economic class, and thus the results may not be generalized to the whole population of Bangladeshi women.

In conclusion, parity and gravidity were found to be positively associated with prevalence of metabolic syndrome among rural Bangladeshi women even after adjusting for potential confounding variables. The results of the present study suggest that multiparous women have increased risk of developing metabolic syndrome among women in this overpopulated country, currently facing near epidemic levels of metabolic syndrome. Further prospective studies are needed to better identify the independent lifestyle and biological factors of metabolic syndrome in relation to parity or gravity. Such data could help in formulating effective public health policies aimed at reducing these health risks.

Author Contributions

Conceived and designed the experiments: SA SJ MMR. Performed the experiments: SA. Analyzed the data: SA MMR. Contributed reagents/materials/analysis tools: SJ MMI MTK. Wrote the manuscript: SA. Critical comments and Revision of manuscripts: SJ TM NY HA.

References

1. World Health Organization (2008) The global burden of disease : 2004 update. Geneva: World Health Organization. 146pp.
2. Bygbjerg IC (2012) Double burden of noncommunicable and infectious diseases in developing countries. Science 337: 1499-1501. doi: 10.1126/science.1223466. PubMed: 22983269.
3. Ghlop N, Davies M, Patel K, Sattar N, Khunti K (2011) Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease in South Asians. Prim Care Diabetes 5: 45-56. doi:10.1016/j.pcd.2010.08.002. PubMed: 20869394.
4. Ford ES, Li C, Sattar N (2006) Metabolic syndrome and incident diabetes: current state of the evidence. Diabetes Care 31: 1898-1904. doi:10.2337/dc08-0423. PubMed: 18591398.
5. Meigs JB, Wilson PW, Fox CS, Vasan RS, Nathan DM et al. (2006) Body mass index, metabolic syndrome, and risk of type 2 diabetes or cardiovascular disease. J Clin Endocrinol Metab 91: 2906-2912. doi: 10.1210/jc.2006-0594. PubMed: 16735483.
6. Mottillo S, Filion KB, Genest J, Joseph L, Pilote L et al. (2010) The metabolic syndrome and cardiovascular risk: a systematic review and meta-analysis. J Am Coll Cardiol 55: 1113-1132. doi:10.1016/j.jacc.2010.05.034. PubMed: 20863953.
7. Gunderson EP, Lewis CE, Murtaugh MA, Queensberry CP, Smith West D et al. (2004) Long-term plasma lipid changes associated with a first birth: the Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults study. Am J Epidemiol 159: 1028-1039. doi:10.1093/aje/kwh146. PubMed: 15155287.
8. Van Stiphout WA, Hofman A (1987) Serum lipids in young women before, during, and after pregnancy. Am J Epidemiol 126: 922-928. PubMed: 3661539.
9. Smith DE, Lewis CE, Caveny JL, Perkins LL, Burke GL et al. (1994) Longitudinal changes in adiposity associated with pregnancy. The CARDIA Study. Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults Study. JAMA 271: 1747-1751. doi:10.1001/jama.271.22.1747. PubMed: 8196117.
10. Ness RB, Schotland HM, Flegal KM, Shofer FS (1994) Reproductive history and coronary heart disease risk in women. Epidemiol Rev 16: 298-314. PubMed: 7713181.
11. Cohen A, Pieper CF, Brown AJ, Bastian LA (2006) Number of children and risk of metabolic syndrome in women. J Womens Health (Larchmt) 15: 765-773. doi:10.1089/jwh.2006.15.763. PubMed: 16910938.
12. Gunderson EP, Jacobs DR Jr, Chiang V, Lewis CE, Tsai A et al. (2009) Adverse effect of pregnancy on high density lipoprotein (HDL) and sex hormone-binding globulin levels in nulliparous and parous women. J Natl Cancer Inst 74: 741-745. PubMed: 3857369.
13. Lewis CE, Funkhouser E, Raczynski JM, Sidney S, Bild DE et al. (1996) Adverse effect of parity on high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol in young adult women. The CARDIA Study. Coron Artery Risk Dev Young Adults AM J Epidemiol 144: 247-254.
14. Mousavi E, Gharipour M, Tavassoli A, Sadri GH, Sarrafzadegan N (2009) Multiparity and risk of metabolic syndrome: Isfahan Healthy Heart Program. Metab Syndr Relat Disord 7: 519-524. doi:10.1089/met.2008.0076. PubMed: 19450155.
15. Misra A, Khurana L (2006) Obesity and the metabolic syndrome in developing countries. J Clin Endocrinol Metab 93: S9-30. doi: 10.1210/jc.2008-1595. PubMed: 18987276.
16. Jesmin S, Islam MR, Islam AMS, Mia MS, Sultana SN et al. (2012) Comprehensive assessment of metabolic syndrome among rural Bangladeshi women. BMC Public Health 12: 49. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-12-49. PubMed: 22257743.
17. Jesmin S, Mia MS, Islam AM, Islam MR, Sultana SN et al. (2011) Prevalence of metabolic syndrome among rural Bangladeshi women. Diabetes Res Clin Pract 95: e7-e9. PubMed: 22015482.
18. Akter S, Jesmin S, Islam M, Sultana SN, Okazaki O et al. (2012) Association of age at menarche with metabolic syndrome and its components in rural Bangladeshi women. Nutr Metab (Lond) 9(1): 99. doi:10.1186/1743-7075-9-99.
19. Grundy SM, Cleeman JI, Daniels JR, Donato KA, Eckel RH et al. (2005) Diagnosis and management of the metabolic syndrome: an American Heart Association/National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute Scientific Statement. Circulation 112: 2732-2752. doi:10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.105.169404. PubMed: 16157765.
20. Taylor JY, Chambers AN, Funnell B, Wu CY (2008) Effects of parity on blood pressure among African-American women. J National Black Nurses’ Association 19: 12–19. PubMed: 10389046.
21. Taylor JY, Sampson DA, Anderson CM, Caldwell D, Taylor AD (2012) Effects of parity on blood pressure among West African Dogon women. Ethn Dis 22: 360–366. PubMed: 22870562.
22. Ness RB, Kramer RA, Flegal KM (1993) Gravidity, blood pressure, and hypertension among white women in the Second National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Epidemiology 4: 303-309. doi:10.1097/00001648-199307000-00005. PubMed: 8347740.
23. Giubertoni E, Bertelli L, Bartolacci Y, Origioni G, Modena MG (2013) Parity as predictor of early hypertension during menopausal transition. J Hypertens 31: 501-507. doi:10.1097/HJH.0b013e3283257172. PubMed: 23196900.
24. Bernstein L, Pike MC, Ross RK, Judd HL, Brown JB et al. (1985) Estrogen and sex hormone-binding globulin levels in nulliparous and parous women. J Natl Cancer Inst 74: 741-745. PubMed: 3857369.
25. Lewis CE, Funkhouser E, Raczynski JM, Sidney S, Bild DE et al. (1996) Adverse effect of parity on high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol in young adult women. The CARDIA Study. Coron Artery Risk Dev Young Adults AM J Epidemiol 144: 247-254.
26. Kritz-Silverstein D, Barnett-Connor E, Wingard DL (1992) The relationship between multiparity and lipoprotein levels in older women. J Clin Epidemiol 45: 761-767. doi:10.1016/0895-4356(92)90053-P. PubMed: 1619455.
27. Rössner S (1992) Pregnancy, weight cycling and weight gain in obesity. Int J Obes Relat Metab Disord 16: 145-147. PubMed: 1316328.
28. Gunderson EP, Murtaugh MA, Lewis CE, Quesenberry CP, West DS et al. (2004) Excess gains in weight and waist circumference associated with childbearing: The Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults Study (CARDIA). Int J Obes Relat Metab Disord 28: 525-535. doi:10.1038/sj.ijo.0802551. PubMed: 14770188.
29. Després JP, Lemieux I (2006) Abdominal obesity and metabolic syndrome. Nature 444: 881-887. doi:10.1038/nature05488. PubMed: 17167477.
30. Vega GL, Adams-Huet B, Peshock R, Willett D, Shah B et al. (2006) Influence of body fat content and distribution on variation in metabolic risk. J Clin Endocrinol Metab 91: 4459-4466. doi:10.1210/jc.2006-0814. PubMed: 16926254.
31. Lawlor DA, Emberson JR, Ebrahim S, Whincup PH, Wannamethee SG et al. (2003) Is the association between parity and coronary heart disease due to biological effects of pregnancy or adverse lifestyle risk factors associated with child-rearing? Findings from the British Women's Heart and Health Study and the British Regional Heart Study. Circulation 107: 1260-1264. doi:10.1161/01.CIR. 0000053441.43495.1A. PubMed: 12628945.