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A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF BIOCHEMICAL CHANGES ACROSS TRIMESTERS AND THE PUERPERIUM PERIOD

Purru Kanakaiah[1], M Sudha[2], Purru Ravi Kumar[3], S Venkata Venu Gopala Raju[4], M. Alice Jameema[5]

[1]PhD Scholar, Department of Physiology, Rajah Muthaiah Medical College, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu, India.
[2]Professor, Department of Physiology, Rajah Muthaiah Medical College, Annamalai University, Chidambaram, Tamilnadu, India.
[3]Assistant Professor, Department of Physiology, Government Medical College, Markapuram, Andhra Pradesh, Inida.
[4]Professor and Head, Department of Physiology, ASRAM Medical College, Eluru, Andhra Pradesh, India.
[5]Professor and Head, Department of Physiology, Government Medical College, Suryapet, Telangana, India.

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Corresponding Author:
Dr. Purru Ravi Kumar,
Email: purru.ravi@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background: Pregnancy initiates numerous biochemical changes that are essential for the growth of the fetus and the well-being of the mother. The objective of this study was to thoroughly examine the biochemical alterations that occur during each trimester of pregnancy and the postpartum period. **Materials & Methods:** A prospective cohort study was carried out at Kona Seema Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Institute, enrolling a total of 120 participants, including pregnant women and control subjects. The biochemical parameters, including Fasting Blood Sugar (FBS), Postprandial Blood Sugar (PPBS), Blood Urea, Serum Creatinine, Uric Acid, Total Proteins, Serum Albumin, Serum Globulin, and Albumin Globulin Ratio, were evaluated at different phases of pregnancy and after childbirth. **Results:** There were notable increases in weight and BMI throughout the trimesters when compared to the control group (p=0.000). Biological examinations demonstrated increasing fasting blood sugar (FBS) and postprandial blood sugar (PPBS) levels throughout pregnancy, suggesting changes in glucose metabolism. Moreover, the decrease in blood urea and serum creatinine levels observed during pregnancy suggests an improvement in renal clearance. The postpartum recovery demonstrated the restoration of these values, highlighting metabolic readjustments. Significant differences were also noted in the levels of serum uric acid, total proteins, albumin, globulin, and the albumin-globulin ratio among different phases, indicating various metabolic adjustments in mothers. **Conclusion:** This thorough examination clarifies the complex biochemical alterations that take place during each trimester of pregnancy and the postpartum period, highlighting their therapeutic importance. Further research is crucial to better understand these biochemical changes, improve prenatal care strategies, and advance obstetric clinical practice.

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is undeniably one of the most intricate and miraculous processes that a woman's body undergoes, orchestrating a series of profound physiological changes to nurture and sustain a new life.[1] From the moment of conception to the transformative journey through trimesters, and finally culminating in the postpartum phase, the female body exhibits an astonishing array of biochemical alterations.[2] These changes are not merely superficial but delve deep into the cellular and molecular realms, ensuring optimal conditions for fetal growth, development, and eventual birth.

Understanding these biochemical alterations is not just a matter of academic interest but holds paramount significance in clinical obstetrics and gynecology. Such insights empower healthcare professionals, particularly gynecologists and obstetricians, to monitor pregnancies more effectively, predict and manage complications, and ultimately ensure the well-being of both the mother and the unborn child.[3] This research embarks on a comprehensive exploration of these intricate biochemical changes, aiming to bridge the existing knowledge gaps and offer a nuanced understanding of pregnancy's biochemical landscape.

As we delve into the depths of this journey, it is crucial to recognize the transformative nature of pregnancy, which can be conceptualized as a series of overlapping phases, each characterized by distinct biochemical signatures. The initial phase encompasses implantation and the first trimester, marked by the establishment of maternal-fetal circulation and the onset of critical developmental processes.[4] This period is a whirlwind of hormonal fluctuations, metabolic shifts, and immune system adaptations, laying the foundation for the subsequent stages of pregnancy.

Transitioning into the second trimester, the biochemical milieu continues to evolve, reflecting the dynamic interplay between maternal physiology and fetal demands.[5] This phase is pivotal, characterized by rapid fetal growth, organogenesis, and heightened metabolic demands, necessitating intricate biochemical adjustments to meet the evolving requirements.[6] As such, biomarkers such as maternal serum proteins, hormones, and metabolic byproducts undergo notable alterations, serving as crucial indicators of fetal well-being and pregnancy progression.

However, the journey does not culminate with childbirth; rather, it transitions into the postpartum phase, a period rife with its own set of biochemical transformations.[7] The immediate postnatal period is characterized by uterine involution, lactation initiation, and a gradual return to pre-pregnancy physiological state.[8] These processes are orchestrated by a myriad of biochemical signals, encompassing hormonal cascades, metabolic recalibrations, and immunological shifts, facilitating maternal recovery and adaptation to the demands of lactation and infant care.

Against this backdrop, it becomes evident that elucidating the intricacies of biochemical alterations throughout pregnancy and the postpartum phase is a monumental task, necessitating a multidisciplinary approach encompassing biochemistry, molecular biology, obstetrics, and gynecology.[9] Previous studies have laid foundational insights into specific aspects of these biochemical changes; however, a holistic understanding remains elusive, warranting comprehensive research endeavors to unravel the complexities inherent in this physiological odyssey.[2]

Furthermore, it is imperative to underscore the clinical implications of these biochemical alterations, given their profound impact on maternal and fetal outcomes.[3] Aberrations in biochemical markers, hormonal imbalances, or metabolic dysregulations can herald potential complications such as gestational diabetes, preeclampsia, or intrauterine growth restrictions, necessitating timely intervention and management strategies.[10] Therefore, a thorough understanding of the biochemical landscape of pregnancy and the postpartum phase is indispensable for optimizing prenatal care, enhancing maternal-fetal outcomes, and advancing the frontiers of obstetric research and clinical practice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Design and Setting

This prospective cohort study was conducted at Kona Seema Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Institute, a tertiary care medical institution renowned for its commitment to scientific research and clinical excellence. The study spanned across multiple phases, encompassing the recruitment of participants during the first trimester of pregnancy, subsequent follow-ups during all trimesters, and the puerperium period. Prior to the commencement of the study, clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethics Committee of Kona Seema Institute of Medical Sciences & Research Institute. All participants provided written informed consent after receiving detailed information about the study objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained throughout the study, adhering strictly to ethical guidelines and principles of biomedical research.

Participant Selection

Inclusion Criteria

- Healthy antenatal mothers within the age range of 22-45 years.
- Women with fewer than three previous deliveries, ensuring a homogenous study population.

Exclusion Criteria

- Women below 22 years and above 46 years of age.
- Individuals with pre-existing chronic illnesses such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, renal failure, cardiac disease, and liver disease, which could confound the biochemical parameters under investigation.

Sample Size and Recruitment

A total of 120 women were initially screened for eligibility, out of which 60 non-pregnant women served as the control group. Age-matched pregnant women in their first trimester were recruited to form the study group, ensuring comparability and minimizing confounding variables.

Baseline anthropometric measurements were meticulously recorded for each participant, encompassing age, height, weight, and Body Mass Index (BMI). These parameters provided essential insights into the participants' physical characteristics, facilitating stratified analyses and interpretations. Venous blood samples were collected after an overnight fast from each participant to assess a comprehensive panel of biochemical parameters, including: Fasting Blood Sugar (FBS), Postprandial Blood Sugar (PPBS), Blood Urea, Serum Creatinine, Uric Acid, Total Proteins, Serum Albumin, Serum Globulin, Albumin Globulin Ratio. Standardized laboratory

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techniques and protocols were employed to ensure accuracy, precision, and reliability of biochemical measurements. Samples were processed promptly, and analyses were performed using state-of-the-art diagnostic equipment under stringent quality control measures. Participants in the study group were followed up meticulously across all trimesters of pregnancy, with comprehensive biochemical assessments conducted at each phase. This longitudinal approach enabled the tracking of dynamic changes in biochemical parameters, elucidating patterns, trends, and potential deviations from normal physiological adaptations. Following childbirth, participants entered the puerperium phase, wherein postpartum biochemical assessments were conducted to evaluate the restoration of biochemical parameters to pre-pregnancy levels. This phase provided invaluable insights into maternal recovery, lactation dynamics, and the postpartum physiological landscape. All data pertaining to anthropometric and biochemical parameters were meticulously documented, coded, and entered into a secure electronic database. Data integrity was ensured through regular validation checks and quality assurance measures.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize baseline characteristics and biochemical parameters across different phases of pregnancy and the puerperium. Longitudinal analyses were conducted using repeated measures ANOVA to assess temporal trends and variations in biochemical parameters across trimesters and the puerperium phase.

RESULTS

In Table 1, depicts various parameters of study participants across different stages of pregnancy and postpartum period are compared with a control group. The parameters evaluated include age, height, weight, and BMI (Body Mass Index). Firstly, regarding age, there was no statistically significant difference observed across the groups, with p-value being 0.260, indicating a relative consistency in age among participants across all stages compared to the control group. Similarly, when considering height, the differences were not statistically significant across the stages, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.104.

However, notable variations were observed in weight and BMI. The weight of participants increased progressively from the first trimester (68.15 ± 10.33 kg) through the second (71.42 ± 10.02 kg) and third trimesters (76.05 ± 9.80 kg). Postpartum, there was a reduction in weight to 65.02 ± 10.23 kg. These differences were found to be statistically significant with p-values of 0.000, denoted by the symbols ##, indicating a significant difference compared to the control group.

Similarly, BMI showed a consistent trend of increase across the stages of pregnancy, with values rising from 27.58 ± 4.75 in the first trimester to 30.76 ± 4.67 in the third trimester. However, a decrease was observed in the postpartum period to 26.31 ± 4.67. Again, these changes were statistically significant with a p-value of 0.000.

Table 2, titled "Comparison of Biochemical parameters during pregnancy and puerperium," provides a comprehensive evaluation of various biochemical parameters across distinct stages of pregnancy and the puerperium phase, juxtaposed against control values.

Firstly, the fasting blood sugar (FBS) levels exhibited a progressive increase from the first trimester (84.8 ± 10.61 mg/dl) to the third trimester (103.56 ± 20.75 mg/dl), followed by a decline in the puerperium stage (89.66 ± 6.29 mg/dl). This trend indicates an altered glucose metabolism during pregnancy, consistent with the physiological insulin resistance that develops to support fetal growth and development (p=0.000).

Secondly, postprandial blood sugar (PPBS) levels demonstrated an initial rise in the first trimester (128.38 ± 14.57 mg/dl) compared to controls (118.23 ± 11.94 mg/dl), followed by a decline in subsequent trimesters and the puerperium phase. This observation underscores the dynamic glucose homeostasis during pregnancy and postpartum recovery (p=0.000).

Furthermore, a notable decline in blood urea levels was evident during pregnancy stages, reaching the lowest in the third trimester (7.38 ± 1.79 mg/dl) compared to controls (12.03 ± 2.31 mg/dl). This may reflect increased glomerular filtration rates and altered renal function to support metabolic and excretory demands during pregnancy (p=0.000).

Serum creatinine levels also exhibited a similar pattern of decline during pregnancy stages, indicative of enhanced renal clearance and adaptation to the metabolic demands of pregnancy. However, postpartum levels reverted closer to control values, emphasizing the physiological recovery of renal function post-delivery (p=0.000).

Furthermore, alterations in serum uric acid, total proteins, albumin, globulin levels, and the albumin-globulin ratio signify the profound biochemical changes occurring during pregnancy. These variations reflect the metabolic adjustments, nutritional demands, and physiological adaptations essential for supporting maternal and fetal well-being throughout gestation and postpartum recovery (p=0.000).

Table 1: Table 1: Baseline characteristics of study participants

Sl. no	Parameter	Controls	First trimester	Second trimester	Third trimester	Puerperium	P value (ANOVA)
1	Age (years)	27.08 ± 3.62	25.75 ± 2.49	25.75 ± 2.49	25.75 ± 2.49	25.75 ± 2.49	0.260

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2	Height (cms)	155.30 ± 5.59	157.58 ± 5.7	157.58 ± 5.7	157.58 ± 5.7	157.58 ± 5.7	0.104
3	Weight (kg)	63.60 ± 10.94	68.15 ± 10.33	71.42 ± 10.02	76.05 ± 9.80##	65.02 ± 10.23$$	0.000
4	BMI (kg/m²)	26.44 ± 4.70	27.58 ± 4.75	28.89 ± 4.69	30.76 ± 4.67##	26.31 ± 4.67$$	0.000

Data expressed as Mean ± SD. BMI: Body Mass Index, SBP: Systolic Blood Pressure, DBP: Diastolic Blood Pressure, PP: Pulse Pressure, RPP: Rate Pressure Product, HR: Heart Rate, MAP: Mean Arterial Pressure.
**** Control vs First trimester @@ Control vs Second trimester ## Control vs third trimester $$ Control vs Puerperium**
**** = p<0.05, @@ = p<0.05, ## = p<0.05, $$ = p<0.05.**

Table 2: Comparison of Biochemical parameters during pregnancy and puerperium

Sl.no	Parameter	Controls	First trimester	Second trimester	Third trimester	Puerperium	P value (ANOVA)
1	FBS (mg/dl)	79.68 ± 6.68	84.8 ± 10.61	100.65 ± 11.12@@	103.56 ± 20.75##	89.66 ± 6.29$$	0.000
2	PPBS (mg/dl)	118.23 ± 11.94	128.38 ± 14.57**	117.24 ± 8.05	113.4 ± 20.69	95.07 ± 6.49	0.000
3	Blood urea (mg/dl)	12.03 ± 2.31	10.08 ± 1.88**	8.73 ± 1.77@@	7.38 ± 1.79##	10.40 ± 2.13$$	0.000
4	S. creatinine (mg/dl)	0.97 ± 0.17	0.88 ± 0.18	0.79 ± 0.21@@	0.70 ± 0.25##	0.88 ± 0.18	0.000
5	S. Uric acid (mg/dl)	4.42 ± 0.48	3.53 ± 0.48**	2.56 ± 0.56@@	3.29 ± 0.71##	4.20 ± 0.67	0.000
6	T. Proteins (g/dl)	7.06 ± 0.57	5.22 ± 0.82**	4.68 ± 0.85@@	4.15 ± 0.91##	5.99 ± 0.71$$	0.000
7	S. Albumin (g/dl)	2.82 ± 0.74	2.20 ± 0.49**	2.02 ± 0.45@@	1.84 ± .50##	3.07 ± 0.41	0.000
8	S. Globulin (g/dl)	4.23 ± 1.10	3.01 ± 0.64**	2.66 ± 0.61@@	2.31 ± 0.63##	2.91 ± 0.41$$	0.000
9	Albumin Globulin ratio	0.80 ± 0.60	0.76 ±0.24**	0.78 ± 0.22@@	0.83 ± 0.23##	1.06 ± 0.14	0.000

Data expressed as Mean ± SD.
**** Control vs First trimester @@ Control vs Second trimester ## Control vs third trimester $$ Control vs Puerperium**
**** = p<0.05, @@ = p<0.05, ## = p<0.05, $$ = p<0.05.**

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in Table 1 shed light on the baseline characteristics of study participants across various stages of pregnancy and the postpartum period, particularly focusing on age, height, weight, and BMI. When juxtaposed with existing literature, several noteworthy observations and trends emerge, echoing findings from prior high-impact studies.
Starting with age and height, our results align with studies that have not reported significant variations across trimesters concerning these parameters. Such consistency underscores the stable nature of these anthropometric measures throughout pregnancy, suggesting that age and height may not be significant variables influencing maternal physiological changes during these periods.
Contrastingly, our study mirrors the trend observed in several high-impact publications, indicating a progressive increase in weight throughout pregnancy. For instance, Johnston et al. (1991) reported a similar observation, where weight incrementally raised from the first to the third trimester.[11] The significant weight gain observed in our study during the third trimester aligns with the physiological demands of fetal growth and maternal adaptations, such as increased blood volume and fat stores.[12]
Moreover, the pronounced changes in BMI observed in our study resonate with findings elucidated a consistent rise in BMI across trimesters.[13] Interestingly, the postpartum reduction in BMI observed in our cohort echoes the post-delivery metabolic and physiological shifts highlighted in studies emphasizing the body's return to pre-pregnancy metabolic states.[14]
The significant differences observed in weight and BMI across the study periods, underscores the dynamic metabolic and physiological changes inherent to pregnancy and postpartum periods. These variations, when compared to control groups, provide valuable insights into the magnitude and significance of these changes, aligning with the broader literature on maternal health and metabolic adaptations.
However, it's crucial to note potential limitations and confounding factors that may influence these findings. Factors such as dietary habits, physical activity, and underlying health conditions could contribute to the observed variations, warranting

further investigation in future studies. Furthermore, while our findings resonate with high-impact literature, variations across populations, ethnicities, and geographic regions may necessitate cautious interpretation and application of these results.

The biochemical parameters delineated in Table 2 present a compelling narrative of the multifaceted biochemical adaptations during pregnancy and the subsequent puerperium phase. Our findings resonate with and deviate from existing literature, thereby enriching our comprehension of maternal biochemistry.

The escalating trend in fasting blood sugar (FBS) levels observed from the first trimester to the third trimester in our study aligns with data from previous reports elucidated the physiological insulin resistance that facilitates nutrient transfer to the fetus.[15] Conversely, the normalization of FBS levels during the puerperium phase in our cohort contrasts with persistent hyperglycemia reported by other reports underscoring the variability in postpartum glucose metabolism.[16]

Similarly, the fluctuations in postprandial blood sugar (PPBS) levels across pregnancy stages in our study mirror the findings highlighted the intricate glucose homeostasis mechanisms during gestation.[17] However, the reduced PPBS levels in our puerperium phase contradict sustained postprandial hyperglycemia reported other investigators emphasizing the heterogeneity in postpartum metabolic recovery.[18]

Furthermore, the declining trends in blood urea and serum creatinine levels during pregnancy stages resonate with studies documenting enhanced renal clearance and metabolic adaptations to support fetal development.[19] These observations align with previous findings, emphasizing the pivotal role of renal function in maintaining maternal-fetal homeostasis.[20] However, the rapid normalization of renal parameters postpartum in our cohort deviates from prolonged renal adjustments highlighting the nuanced renal recovery trajectories post-delivery.[21]

The alterations in serum uric acid, total proteins, albumin, globulin levels, and the albumin-globulin ratio in our study corroborate with the biochemical shifts reported by previous reports underscoring the comprehensive metabolic and nutritional adaptations during pregnancy.[6] Notably, the postpartum restoration of these parameters in our cohort contrasts with prolonged biochemical imbalances documented, emphasizing diverse maternal recovery pathways.[22]

While our study's findings provide valuable insights into maternal biochemistry, potential limitations warrant consideration. Factors such as maternal age, dietary habits and prenatal care may influence these biochemical variations, necessitating cautious interpretation and comprehensive analyses in future investigations.[23]

CONCLUSION

Our study's comparative analysis of biochemical parameters during pregnancy and puerperium stages contributes to the evolving understanding of maternal physiology. By aligning with and diverging from high-impact literature, our findings elucidate the dynamic biochemical adaptations essential for maternal and fetal well-being. Future research endeavors should prioritize exploring underlying mechanisms, integrating diverse cohorts, and elucidating potential confounders to enhance clinical relevance and applicability.

Conflicts of interest
Nil.

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