

Undetected large asymptomatic ovarian cyst in pregnancy: a case study of ovarian cystectomy at Caesarean section

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Background

Ovarian cysts are found in approximately 1 in 25 to 1 in 100 pregnancies, often detected incidentally during routine ultrasound scans. While most cysts are asymptomatic and benign, larger or atypical cysts can pose clinical risks, including ovarian torsion, rupture, or malignancy¹. Large cysts occur in less than 1% of pregnancies². Ovarian cystectomy is generally recommended for cysts greater than 5 cm due to the increased risk of complications, although some may resolve spontaneously.

Ultrasound detection can be hindered by factors such as maternal obesity and the gravid uterus, which can obscure the ovaries, especially in the second and third trimesters.

Discussion

The unexpected discovery of the ovarian cyst during Caesarean section raised important learning points. In this emergency situation, the risks of ovarian torsion, rupture, and persistent pain were weighed against the benefits of cystectomy during the same surgery rather than at a later interval. Immediate removal minimised the risk of future complications and additional surgeries, ensuring both maternal and fetal safety.

References
1 Bulus MC. Ovarian cysts and pregnancy: what is new? A literature review. J South Asian Feder Obst Gynae. 2024;16(S3):1–5. doi:10.5005/jp-journals-10006-2549. Nanak Bhagat, Ketankumar Gajjar,
2 Management of ovarian cysts during pregnancy, Obstetrics, Gynaecology & Reproductive Medicine, Volume 32, Issue 9, 2022, Pages 205-210, ISSN 1751-7214, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ogrm.2022.06.002.

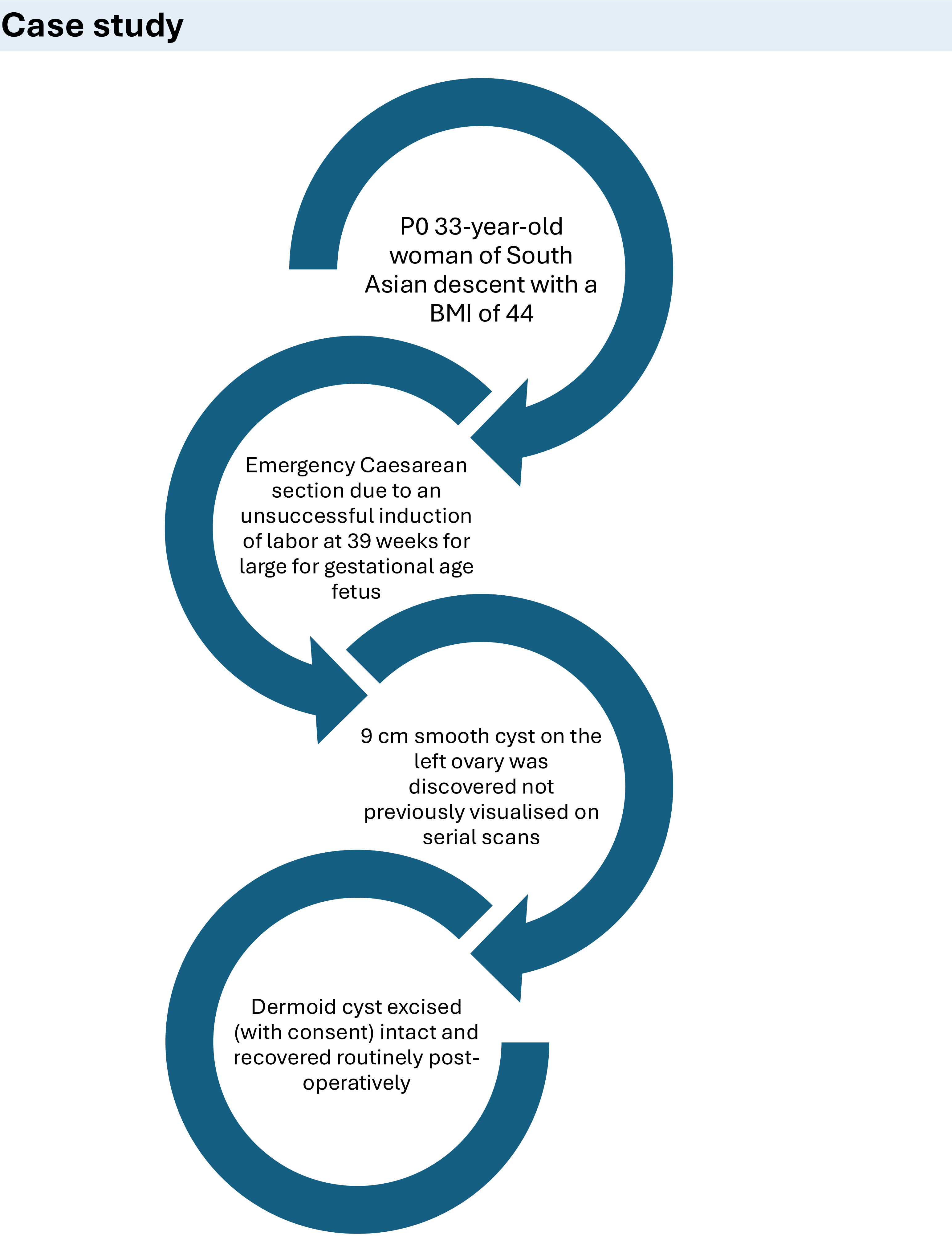


Table 1: Types of ovarian cysts and occurrence in pregnancy	
Type of Ovarian Cyst	Typical Occurrence in Pregnancy
Corpus luteum cyst	Common in the first trimester
Theca lutein cyst	Associated with molar pregnancy or high hCG states
Dermoid cyst (mature teratoma)	Can occur at any stage, often incidental
Serous cystadenoma	Occasionally detected incidentally
Mucinous cystadenoma	Occasionally detected incidentally
Endometrioma	Rare in pregnancy (often regresses)
Functional follicular cyst	Early pregnancy, often self-resolving

Conclusion

While most ovarian cysts are detected antenatally, a small percentage remain undiagnosed due to factors such as maternal obesity or restricted imaging. This case highlights the limitations of ultrasonography in patients with larger body habitus, which is an increasing problem with the ever-growing prevalence of obesity. The risks and benefits of cystectomy should be weighed carefully, considering the patient's individual circumstances. In such cases, informed consent, even in an emergency setting, is important to ensure patient autonomy and safety.