

PARITY AND SEXUAL BEHAVIOR IN PREGNANCY

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Summary: Correlation between parity and sexual behavior during pregnancy was studied in 106 pluriparous and 69 primiparous patients. Sexual desire, frequency of coitus, frequency of orgasm, which partner initiated sexual activity, and level of sexual satisfaction were analyzed in the year before pregnancy and during pregnancy. Sexual desire, frequency of coitus, and sexual satisfaction were qualitatively equal in both groups. The frequency of coitus in particular decreased progressively in the three trimesters of pregnancy and more evidently in the pluriparous. The partner who initiated sexual activity most frequently was the male in the pluriparous group.

In a preceding study of sexual behavior in pregnancy, sexual desire, incidence of coitus and orgasm, level of sexual satisfaction, and which partner initiated coitus were studied in the year preceding pregnancy and during pregnancy in 175 women who delivered in the third trimester of pregnancy at the First Clinic of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Catania University, Catania, Italy⁽¹⁾. A reduction in sexual desire, in coitus, and in orgasm progressively from the first to third trimester of pregnancy, which was in agreement with data reported in literature, was observed^(1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

The aim of this present study is to evaluate sexual behavior in pregnancy in relation to parity of the patient.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In March 1985, 175 women, chosen at random among patients who delivered in the third trimester of pregnancy at our Department, were

requested to fill out a semistructured questionnaire for the evaluation of the correlation between parity and sexual behavior in the three trimesters of pregnancy.

The text of the questionnaire is reported in table 1. The first section of the questionnaire is dedicated to sexual behavior of the couple in the year before pregnancy, and inquires about the presence or lack of sexual desire, the frequency of coitus (rare, 1 to 2, 3 to 4, or 5 or more times per week), the frequency of orgasm (never, almost never, almost always, always), the level of sexual satisfaction (unsatisfying, slightly satisfying, satisfying, very satisfying), which partner took the sexual initiative (him, her, both), and whether the pregnancy was desired, undesired but psychologically well accepted, or undesired and psychologically unaccepted.

The second section of the questionnaire involves the three trimesters of pregnancy, inquiring about the presence or lack of sexual desire, the frequency of coitus (rare, 1 to 2, 3 to 4, or 5 or more times per week), which partner took the sexual initiative (him, her, both), whether there were medical contraindications for coitus, and whether fear of abortion or harm to the fetus or mother existed.

Statistical evaluation of the results was performed utilizing the χ -square test and a value

Table 1. — *Questionnaire on sexuality during pregnancy.*

1. Age.
2. Parity.
3. Education.
4. Employment.
5. Medical contraindication to coitus in pregnancy.
SECTION A: Sexuality prior to pregnancy.
6. Sexual desire: yes/no.
7. Incidence of coitus: rare, 1-3, 4-5, more frequently than 5 a week.
8. Incidence of orgasm: never, almost never, almost always, always.
9. Assessment of sexual relationship: unsatisfying, satisfying, very satisfying, slightly satisfying.
10. Which partner initiated the sexual activity: both, him, her.
SECTION B: Sexual behavior during pregnancy.
11. Incidence of desired pregnancy, unplanned psychologically accepted pregnancy, unplanned psychologically unaccepted pregnancy.
12. Sexual desire in 1st, 2nd, 3rd trimester: normal, decreased, increased.
13. Incidence of coitus: as prior to pregnancy, decreased, increased, no coitus.
14. Incidence or orgasm: never, almost never, almost always, always.
15. Assessment of sexual relationship: satisfying, very satisfying, unsatisfying, no coitus.
16. Which partner initiated the sexual activity: both, him, her.
17. Incidence of fear of abortion, harm to the fetus or harm to the mother's own body during coitus.

Table 2. — *Age distribution in primiparous and pluriparous.*

	Primiparous no.	%	Pluriparous no.	%
16 - 20	19	27.53	5	4.72 *
21 - 25	29	42.03	31	29.25 **
26 - 30	14	20.30	44	41.50 **
31 - 35	5	7.24	19	17.93 •
> 35	2	2.90	7	6.60 •

* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 3. — *Level of education.*

	Primiparous no.	%	Pluriparous no.	%
Illiterate	—	—	5	4.72 •
Elementary	15	21.74	41	38.69 •
Junior high school	20	28.98	30	28.30 •
High school	24	34.78	26	24.52 •
University	10	14.50	4	3.77 *

* $p < 0.01$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 4. — *Occupation.*

	Primiparous no.	%	Pluriparous no.	%
Housewife	45	65.22	82	77.35 •
Manual laborer	3	4.35	3	2.83 •
Nurse	1	1.44	6	5.67 •
Employed	9	13.05	10	9.43 •
Teacher	9	13.05	5	4.72 *
Professional	2	2.89	—	— •

* $p < 0.05$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 5. — *Sexual desire before pregnancy.*

	Primiparous no.	%	Pluriparous no.	%
Yes	69	100	105	99.06 •
No	—	—	1	0.94 •

• N.S. = not significant

Table 6. — *Incidence of coitus before pregnancy.*

	Primiparous no.	%	Pluriparous no.	%
Rare	1	1.44	1	0.94 •
1 or 2 a week	11	15.95	24	22.64 •
3 or 4 a week	33	47.83	59	55.66 •
5 to 8 a week	24	34.78	22	20.76 *

* $p < 0.05$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 7. — Incidence of orgasm before pregnancy.

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
Always	6	8.70	10	9.44 •
Almost always	38	55.08	52	49.05 •
Usually "yes"	22	31.88	40	37.74 •
Usually "no"	2	2.90	4	3.77 •

• N.S. = not significant

Table 8. — Sexual satisfaction before pregnancy.

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
Unsatisfying	—	—	1	0.94 •
Satisfying	39	56.52	90	84.91 *
Very satisfying	28	40.58	13	12.27 *
Slightly satisfying	2	2.90	2	1.88 •

* $p < 0.01$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 9. — Initiation of sexual activity before pregnancy.

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
Female	—	—	1	0.94 •
Male	16	23.18	34	32.07 •
Both	53	76.82	71	66.99 •

• N.S. = not significant

Table 10. — Incidence of undesired pregnancy (A). — Unplanned psychologically accepted pregnancy (B). — Unplanned psychologically unaccepted pregnancy (C).

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
A	53	76.82	64	60.39 *
B	15	21.74	40	37.73 •
C	1	1.44	2	2.88 •

* $p < 0.05$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 11. — Sexual satisfaction in pregnancy.

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
No sexual activity	2	2.90	5	4.72 •
Unsatisfying	12	17.40	23	21.69 •
Satisfying	52	75.36	73	68.87 •
Very satisfying	3	4.39	5	4.72 •

• N.S. = not significant

Table 12. — Initiation of sexual activity in pregnancy.

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
Male	18	26.08	48	45.27 *
Female	2	2.90	1	0.95 •
Both	42	60.86	54	50.94 •

* $p < 0.01$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 13. — Incidence of orgasm in pregnancy.

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
Always	4	5.79	11	10.37 •
Almost always	18	26.08	28	26.41 •
Usually "yes"	30	43.48	31	29.25 *
Usually "no"	13	18.85	31	29.25 •
No sexual activity	2	2.90	5	4.72 •
Never	2	2.90	—	— •

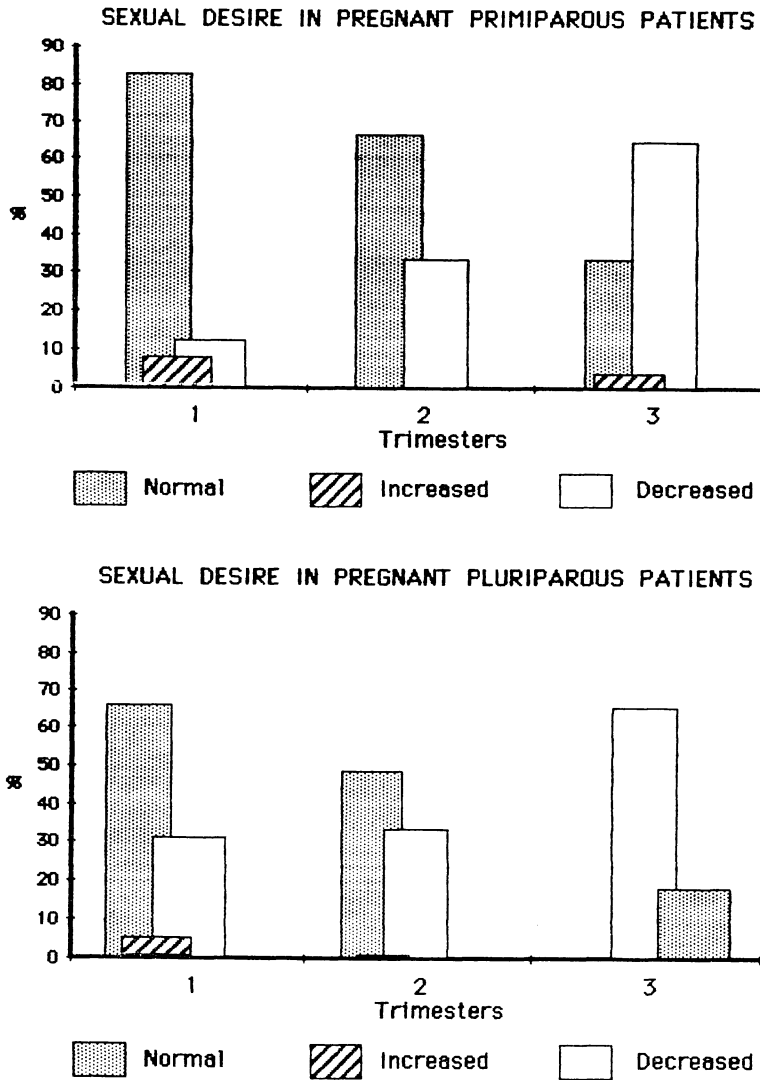
* $p < 0.05$

• N.S. = not significant

Table 14. — Incidence of fear of abortion, harm to the fetus or harm to the mother's own body during coitus and threatened abortion or premature delivery.

	Primiparous no. %		Pluriparous no. %	
Fear of abortion	15	21.73	31	29.24 •
Fear of harm to the fetus	34	49.27	42	39.62 •
Fear of harm to the mother's own body	10	14.49	20	18.86 •
No fear	25	36.23	45	42.45 •
Treatened abortion	2	2.89	3	2.83 •
Treatened preterm delivery	1	1.44	2	1.88 •

• N.S. = not significant



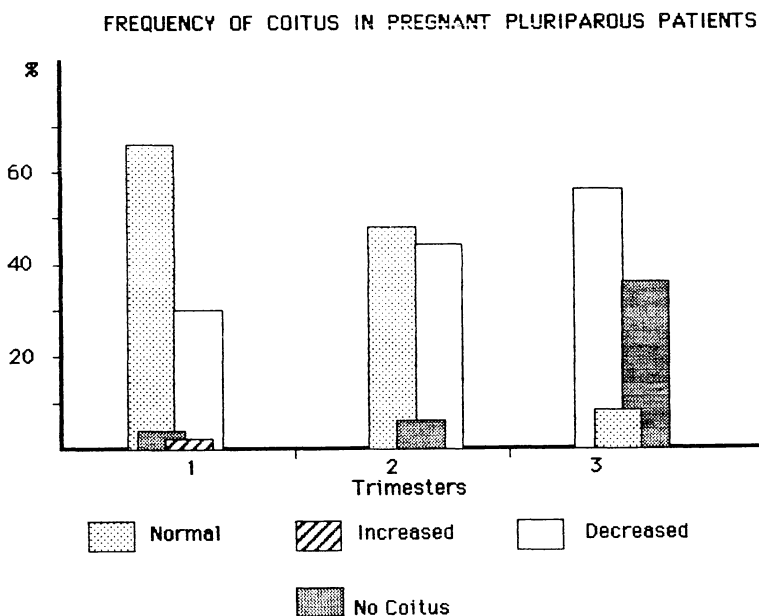
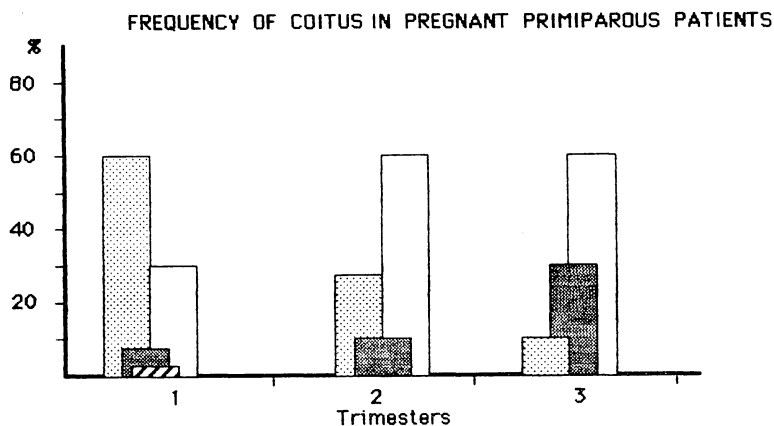
Graph 1.

less than or equal to 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

69 primiparous and 105 pluriparous patients were studied. Table 2 reports the age of the patients. Among the primiparous, whose age ranged from 16 to 39 years, the higher percentage of patients were aged between 21 and 25 (42.03%; 29 cases), while among the pluriparous whose ages ranged between 16 and 39,

the higher percentage of patients was aged between 26 and 30 years (41.50%; 44 cases). The age distribution demonstrated a statistically higher frequency in the primiparous aged between 16 and 30 years ($p < 0.05$). Level education is reported in table 3.

The occupations of the patients are reported in table 4. Housewives prevailed in both groups of women (65.22% or 45 cases among the pri-



Graph 2.

miparous and 77.35% or 82 cases among the pluriparous) and there were no significant differences in the various occupations.

RESULTS

The results of the study are reported in tables 5 through 14 and in graphs 1 and 2.

From the study of sexual behavior before pregnancy there were no significant statistical differences in presence or lack of desire between the primiparous and pluriparous (table 5), in the frequency of orgasm (table 7), in the level of sexual satisfaction (table 8), and in which partner

initiated sexual activity (table 9). Only 1 pluriparous patient refused coitus for fear of pregnancy. The frequency of coitus (table 6) was equal in the two groups of women studied with the exception that in the group of women in which the frequency of coitus was greater than or equal to 5 times per week, the primiparous prevailed ($p < 0.05$). The incidence of desired pregnancy ($p < 0.05$) as well as that of undesired but psychologically well accepted pregnancy ($p < 0.05$) was higher in the pluriparous (table 10).

Sexual desire diminished in both groups of women (graph 1), and was most evident in the pluriparous in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy ($p < 0.05$ in both groups). Only in exceptional cases did sexual desire increase in pregnancy, occurring in 8 cases, prevalently in the first trimester and with equal incidence in the pluriparous and primiparous.

The incidence of coitus (graph 2) decreased progressively in the three trimesters of pregnancy and more evidently in the primiparous in the first and second trimesters ($p < 0.01$); the number of couples that avoided coitus in pregnancy was high both in the primiparous (30.43%; 21 cases) and in the pluriparous (35.84%; 38 cases) (graphs 11). The level of sexual satisfaction was not significantly different in the two groups of women, and 17.40% (12 cases) of primiparous and 21.69% (23 cases) of pluriparous patients reported it as unsatisfying (table 11). In the pluriparous, however, the number of couples in which the male initiated sexual activity was higher ($p < 0.01$). The incidences of orgasm, medical contraindication to coitus, fear of abortion or injury to the fetus, and

harm to the mother during coitus in pregnancy were not different in the two groups of women (table 14).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The changes in sexual behaviour with regard to sexual desire, incidence of coitus, and sexual satisfaction during pregnancy compared to that before pregnancy were not qualitatively different in the primiparous and in the pluriparous. We have stated that the incidence of coitus decreases progressively in the three trimesters of pregnancy, but more evidently in the pluriparous. In the pluriparous however the number of males who initiated sexual activity was significantly higher. It is not evident, contrary to expectation, that the inexperience of the primiparous caused a larger decrease in sexual activity in pregnancy and the incidence of fear of abortion, fear of doing injury to the fetus, or fear of doing harm to the mother was equal in pregnant women regardless of parity. On the contrary, however, the primiparous seemed to have a relatively higher level of sexual activity during pregnancy.

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