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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Sexuality of the Tunisian pregnant women: Facts between myth and reality[☆]

I. Bouzouita^{a,*,1}, F. Ellouze^b, H. El Kefi^a, I. Chaari^b,
C. Ben Cheikh^a, M.W. Krir^a, S. Eddhif^a, B. Bouguerra^c,
A. Oumaya^a

^a Service de psychiatrie, faculté de médecine de Tunis El Manar, hôpital militaire de première instruction de Tunis, Tunis, Tunisia

^b Service de psychiatrie Ibn Jazzar, faculté de médecine de Tunis El Manar, hôpital Razi, Manouba, Tunis, Tunisia

^c Service de gynécologie et obstétrique B, faculté de médecine de Tunis El Manar, hôpital Charles-Nicolle de Tunis, Tunis, Tunisia

KEYWORDS

Sexual dysfunction;
Pregnancy;
Sexuality;
Pregnant women

Summary

Introduction. – Pregnancy is an important stage in women's life. Different changes may occur during this period and can affect many fields especially sexuality.

Objective. – The purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of pregnancy on the sexuality of the pregnant woman.

Methods. – A descriptive study was performed on 100 pregnant and healthy women. Demographic data and women's concerns about sexuality were investigated by a questionnaire. The Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI) questionnaire was used to evaluate sexual dysfunction.

Results. – The mean age of participant women was 29.4 ± 5.6 years. The mean total score of FSFI was 23.1 ± 5.8 . Seventy percent (70%) of women were experiencing sexual dysfunction in all of the three trimesters. An alteration of sexuality during pregnancy was observed with less sexual intercourses, less desire and less arousal. Common misconceptions and mistaken beliefs had an important role in this alteration. Social factors and the gynecological history were significantly associated with sexual dysfunction and marital agreement was an important element related with sexual satisfaction.

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* Corresponding author at: 8, Abouzaied El Hilali street, 2010 Mannouba, Tunisia.

E-mail addresses: bouzouita.imen@gmail.com (I. Bouzouita), dr.ellouze.faten@gmail.com (F. Ellouze), HAMDIElKefi@gmail.com (H. El Kefi), dr.imen.chaari@gmail.com (I. Chaari), bencheikhchaker@hotmail.com (C. Ben Cheikh), wassim.krir@outlook.com (M.W. Krir), sami-dhif@hotmail.com (S. Eddhif), bouguerra49@yahoo.fr (B. Bouguerra), oumabdel@yahoo.fr (A. Oumaya).

¹ Permanent address.

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Conclusion. – The prevalence of sexual dysfunction was 70% in our study. Many factors like wrong ideas, social factors, marital agreement and the gynecological history were associated with the sexual dysfunction observed in Tunisian pregnant women.

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Introduction

Pregnancy is one of the most privileged moments in a woman's life. It represents a timeframe of an intense change affecting the physical, mental and sexual state of the female body. It is also a delicate phase exposing the problematic issue between womanhood and motherhood.

In African societies, even the modern ones, sexuality throughout pregnancy is still a taboo subject and seldom discussed (Babazadeh et al., 2013). Dealing with sexuality throughout pregnancy leads us to investigate this particular sexual life, desire, pleasure, the couple's relationship, concerns about the pregnancy in a non-productive sexual activity.

Perinatal healthcare in Tunisia had known a growing interest providing systemized and precise follow-up in specialized units (El Mhamdi et al., 2010). However, sexuality remained seldom investigated by healthcare professionals.

Our objective was to explore sexuality during pregnancy in a population of Tunisian pregnant women, to evaluate their sexual function and to highlight factors linked to a sexual dysfunction or a reduction in sexual intercourses.

Patients and methods

We conducted a cross-sectional study among a population of pregnant women having their pregnancy follow-up in perinatal outpatient clinic in Charles Nicolle's university hospital in Tunis over a one-month period.

We included all women with evolving monofetal pregnancy in all trimesters, living with a partner at the time of the study inclusion and who accepted to participate in the study.

We excluded women with complicated pregnancies (gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, amniotic fluid abnormality...), fetal malformation, proven contraindications to sexual intercourses (placenta previa, preterm premature rupture of membranes...). We also excluded women with precious, twin or multiple pregnancies.

A total of 100 pregnant women were included in this study. We used a 42 item semi-structured interview to collect demographic data, information about the couple, obstetric and gynecological history and current pregnancy data, performed by the same interviewer.

In order to investigate sexuality throughout pregnancy among these woman, we searched for received ideas and sexual intercourse beliefs during pregnancy, the value of sexuality for each women, frequency of intercourses before and during current pregnancy and sexual desire during pregnancy. We also investigated the husband's perception of sexuality during the current pregnancy.

Sexual function was measured by a standardized 19-item self-administered questionnaire: female sexual function

index (FSFI) (Rosen et al., 2000). We used the validated Arabic version of the FSFI (Anis et al., 2011). This questionnaire assesses six domains of the sexual function: desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, satisfaction, and pain. Sexual dysfunction is defined by a total FSFI score ≤ 26.55 (Wiegel et al., 2005).

All data were analyzed with SPSS 19.0 software. Student's *t*-test was used to compare means. Pearson Chi² test was used to compare proportions among independent groups. McNemar test was used to compare paired proportions. A *P*-value ≤ 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

All pregnant women were informed of the purpose of the study and of the right to refuse to participate without affecting their medical follow-up. Informed consent was obtained and confidentiality assured. Some participants refused to answer questions. Only pregnant women who gave their consent were included.

The delicacy of the subject was taken into account and the questions were asked with politeness without the presence of any third parties. Participant's anonymity was respected.

A literature search on Medline and Pubmed was performed.

Statistical study

The mean age of the pregnant women was 29.4 ± 5.6 years versus 35.4 ± 6.5 years for the husbands. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the participants were of rural origin and 33% of urban origin. Fifty percent (50%) had secondary school education and 62% were housewives. Seventy-three (73%) were of medium socioeconomic status. The duration of marriage was 18 ± 4.6 months. It was a love marriage in 67% of the cases. Marital agreement was reported in 65%.

Eleven percent (11%) of the participants had a history of voluntary pregnancy termination. More than 40% of the pregnant women were in their first pregnancy.

The mean pregnancy term was 177.8 ± 62.9 days (25 gestational weeks ± 9 weeks). Forty-two (42%) of the pregnant women were in their third trimester and 39% in the second trimester of pregnancy.

Results

Sexuality throughout pregnancy

Sixty-three percent (63%) of the pregnant women reported a decrease in sexual intercourse frequency, estimated at 3.5 ± 2.6 intercourses per week before pregnancy versus 2.2 ± 1.9 intercourses per week during pregnancy ($P = 0.006$).

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