

EFFECT OF PREGNANCY ON SEXUALITY

By

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SUMMARY

Effect of pregnancy on sexuality of 116 couples is studied through prospectively. It was found that the coital frequency decreases with pregnancy though the orgasmic acts remained the same. 37% women had altered body image which affected the sexuality of the couple. Husbands also register a decreased desire when their wives were pregnant. 18% of husbands thought of extra-marital liaisons and 13% indulged in the same, during their wives' pregnancy. Breasts become more sensitive with pregnancy. 1st trimester was the most pleasure giving phase and some couples found new erotic zones during pregnancy.

Introduction

Many myths and mysteries based upon assumptions and poorly reached conclusions, surround aspects related to sex in pregnancy. How each individual integrated sexual expression in her life, while pregnant depends upon many factors including her sexual value system, general health and her overall personality. (Reamy, 1985).

Till date very few studies have been carried out to know about sexuality in pregnant Indian women. As a result, though our society has totally different perceptions regarding sexuality than the West, we have to follow the western literature for drawing conclusions regarding our set-up. It is with this aim of knowing about the effect of pregnancy on sexuality

of pregnant Indian women, that this prospective study was carried out.

Material and Methods

This prospective study, was carried out in the Dept. of Obst. & Gynec. Medical College, Baroda in which 116 couples were interviewed as regards to different aspects of sexuality, when the female partner was pregnant. They were interviewed during the antenatal clinic visit of the lady.

Both partners were initially screened for general health and well being. Those with any specific areas of concern in health were excluded. Also those couples who lacked good relations amongst the husband and wife, were also not considered as these two factors can bias the study.

Results

As shown in Table I, the coital frequency decreased during pregnancy in

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61.2% couples, but the pleasure and the no. of acts culminating in orgasm remained nearly unaffected, in most of them.

TABLE I
Sexuality of Wife-A

	No.	%
<i>Coital Frequency</i>		
— Increased	4	3.44
— Same	41	35.34
— Decreased	71	61.21
<i>Coital Pleasure</i>		
— Increased	11	9.48
— Same	57	49.14
— Decreased	48	41.38
<i>Orgasmic Acts</i>		
— Increased	4	3.44
— Same	88	75.86
— Decreased	24	20.68

Alteration in body image is said to be a very important factor influencing the sexuality of a couple in pregnancy. Such an alteration was found in 46.55% of women. This in turn affected sexuality of 53.3% of these. This is shown in Table II.

TABLE II
Sexuality of Wife-B

	No.	%
<i>Changes in Body Image</i>		
— More attractive	8	6.9
— Same	62	53.45
— Less attractive	43	37.07
— Ugly	3	2.59
<i>Change Affected Sexual Performance?</i>		
— Yes	29	53.37
— No	25	46.63
<i>"Turned Off" Feeling</i>		
— Yes	65	56.03
— No	51	43.97
<i>Superstitious Feelings</i>		
— Yes	35	30.17
— No	81	69.83

Also, nearly 65 of the 116 women had a 'turned off' feeling towards sex, when pregnant.

As regards the husbands, in 48.28% the desire changed as is shown in Table III. Of these in 41.57% it though decreased, in 6.89% (i.e. 8/116) the desire actually increased.

TABLE III
Pregnancy and Sexuality in Husband

	No.	%
<i>Change in Desire</i>		
Increased	8	6.89
Same	60	51.72
Decreased	48	41.57
<i>"Turned off" Feeling</i>		
Yes	5	4.32
No	111	95.68
<i>Misbeliefs</i>		
Present	24	20.69
Absent	92	79.31
<i>Sense of "Immorality"</i>		
Present	18	15.52
Absent	98	84.48
<i>Sense of Fetus as an "Observer"</i>		
Yes	3	2.59
No	113	97.41
<i>Thought of Extramarital Liaisons</i>		
Yes	21	18.12
No	95	81.89
<i>Developed Extramarital Liaisons</i>		
Yes	16	13.79
No	100	86.31

65.68% husbands registered a 'turned off' feeling significantly. On the other hand only about 15.5% registered a sense of 'immorality' in having sex with pregnant wife and only 2.59% felt the fetus as an observer to the act. These figures are strikingly in contrast to the western literature.

Significantly 18% of husband thought of having extramarital relations and 13.8% of these actually indulged in the same, as shown in Table III.

Table IV shows that about 14% changed the posture as pregnancy advanced. When asked about the influence of trimester on sexual pleasure, nearly 76% felt that 1st trimester was maximum pleasure giving. More than 50% women felt an increased sensitivity of breasts during pregnancy and nearly 20% couples found new erotic zones, which hitherto were hidden from them.

TABLE IV
General Views (Misc.)

	No.	%
Change in Posture —		
Yes	16	13.79
No	100	86.21
Maximum Pleasure Vis-a-vis trimester		
I	88	75.86
II	20	17.24
III	8	6.9
Increased Sensitivity of Breasts—		
Yes	60	51.72
No	56	48.27
Change in Sensitivity of Erotic Zones—		
Yes	24	20.67
No	92	79.31
New Erotic Zones		
Yes	21	
— Abdomen	11	
— Back	7	
— Ears	3	

Discussion

Many interesting features are brought out by the results of the study.

It should be noted that there was a near equal distribution of patients in all the

three income groups of less than Rs 500 p.m., equal to or more than Rs. 500 p.m. Also there was an equal distribution between those from joint and nuclear families, and 96% had adequate privacy. These are some of the factors which can affect the sexuality of any couple and are thus not allowed to play any role in the present study, so as to reduce a bias in the study.

Reduction in coital frequency during pregnancy has been reported by Lendis (1980) and Solberg (1972), and is reproduced in this study. But even at a reduced frequency the number of acts culminating in orgasm remained unaffected. Thus the quality of the acts do not alter with pregnancy.

The present study concurs with the results of Masters (1966), who showed that the body image significantly altered with pregnancy. The fact that a near equal number also registered a 'turned off' feeling from sex during pregnancy. This explains pregnancy affects sexuality of a couple by altering the body image of the woman, which in turn leads to a 'turned off' feeling which ultimately leads to a decrease in coital acts.

Nearly 30% of couples had misbeliefs regarding sex in pregnancy, which at times were rank superstitious.

The husband had also significant changes in his sexuality due to the pregnancy of his wife. In nearly 50% the desire altered. However, only 4% said that the appearance of a pregnant wife 'turned off'. This is required to be understood in the light of Indian psyche where-in sex in itself is considered a taboo subject and thus sex with a pregnant wife in itself can lead to various confusing feelings in the husband. This explains the reduced desire in absence of 'turned off' feeling. This reduced desire and reduc-

tion of coital frequency with a pregnant wife leads more than 15% to consider extramarital liaisons and nearly 13% admitted of actually indulging in the same. This has been shown by Masters (1966) also.

The fact that nearly 75% found 1st trimester as the best, though significant is also understandable. The explanation for this is multifold: viz; small fetal size, minimum abdominal distension, unadvanced pregnancy to reduce desire significantly and so on.

The increased sensitivity of breasts is partly attributable to an increase in congestion and size of the breasts during pregnancy. Amongst 60 couples who did report the same in this study, in some it was so severe that at times it became painful and in some others it was found to be so pleasure giving that the couple enjoyed this state much more than the pre-pregnancy state.

Conclusions

1. Coital frequency decreases with pregnancy, though the orgasmic acts of these, remained the same.

2. Significant number of women had a change in body image due to pregnancy of which 37% felt less attractive.

3. Change in body image affected the sexuality of the couple.

4. 18% of husbands thought of extramarital liaisons and 13% actually indulged in the same.

5. Breasts become more sensitive in pregnancy and 1st trimester being more pleasure giving phase.

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