

# SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN RELATION TO AGE: A STUDY OF 205 PUERPERAL WOMEN

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*Summary:* Sexual desire, frequency of coitus, frequency of orgasm, which partner took the first sexual initiative, and the level of sexual satisfaction were studied in 205 women in puerperium in relation to age in the year preceeding pregnancy and during pregnancy. It seems evident that sexual desire and the frequency of coitus and orgasm diminish during pregnancy independently of age. The group of younger women (16 to 20 years old) in our study maintained a relatively higher level of sexual activity especially in comparison to older women (36 to 40 years old). The number of women who took the first sexual initiative increased considerably in pregnancy.

*Key words:* Sexuality, coitus, orgasm, pregnancy, sexual desire.

## INTRODUCTION

Age is a factor that conditions certain aspects of sexual behavior such as psychophysical maturity and experience.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between age and certain aspects of sexual behavior in married fertile women.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

205 women chosen at random among those who gave birth at the First Clinic of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Catania University Medical School, Catania (Italy), in March and April 1985 were interviewed with a semistructured questionnaire to study some aspects of sexual behavior in the year preceeding pregnancy and during pregnancy.

The patients were divided into five groups according to age: 15 to 20 years old (Group A, 25 cases), 21 to 25 years old (Group B, 57 cases), 26 to 30 years old (Group C, 61 cases), 31 to 35 years old (Group D, 22 cases), and 36 to 40 years old (Group E, 40 cases) (table 1). All groups were homogeneous with regard to work activity (housewife) and education (not greater than high school diploma).

Parameters studied included the presence of sexual desire (defined as normal by same patients), frequency of coitus (rare, 1-2, 3-4,  $\geq 5$  per week, frequency of orgasm (always, almost always, usually yes, usually no, never), which

partner took the first initiative in intercourse (him, her, both), the level of sexual satisfaction in the year preceeding pregnancy (very satisfying, satisfying, not satisfying), in how many cases was the pregnancy programmed, and if not programmed, was the pregnancy well accepted psychologically. The following parameters were studied for the period during pregnancy: sexual desire (as before pregnancy, increased, decreased) frequency of coitus (as before pregnancy, increased, decreased, no sexual activity), which partner took the first sexual initiative (him, her, both), and the level of sexual satisfaction.

The statistical analysis presented was evaluated with the  $\chi^2$  test and a value of  $p \leq 0.05$  was considered significant.

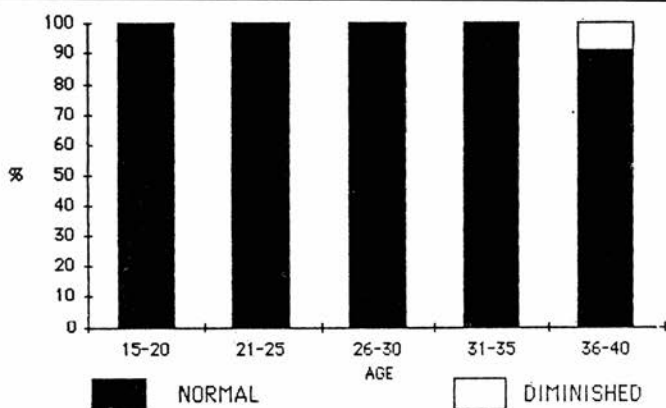
## RESULTS

Sexual desire in the year preceeding pregnancy was normal in all cases with the exception of some cases in group E (di-

Table 1. - *Patient's age distribution (205 cases).*

Group	Age	No.	%
A	16-20	25	11.21
B	21-25	57	27.80
C	26-30	61	29.75
D	31-35	22	10.73
E	36-40	40	19.51

Table 2 a. — *Sexual desire before pregnancy.*  $p > 0.05$  in all cases.



minished: 10%, 4 cases), but there were no statistically significant differences in any of the age groups. Sexual desire during pregnancy (table 2b) rarely increased in groups B, C, and D; there was, however, a reduction in sexual desire in a large

number of cases and this was evident in the first trimester in groups D (40.90%; 9 cases) and E (50%; 6 cases) with significant difference between A and E ( $p < 0.05$ ). Sexual desire decreased in the second trimester especially in group E

Table 2 b. — *Sexual desire in pregnancy.* 1st trimester: normal A-D  $p < 0.01$ ; A-E  $p < 0.01$ ; decreased: A-E  $p < 0.01$ ; 2nd trimester: normal: A-E  $p < 0.01$ ; decreased: A-E  $p < 0.05$ ; B-E  $p < 0.05$ ; C-E  $p < 0.01$ ; D-E  $p < 0.05$ ; 3rd trimester: normal: A-E  $p < 0.05$ ;  $p > 0.05$  in other cases.

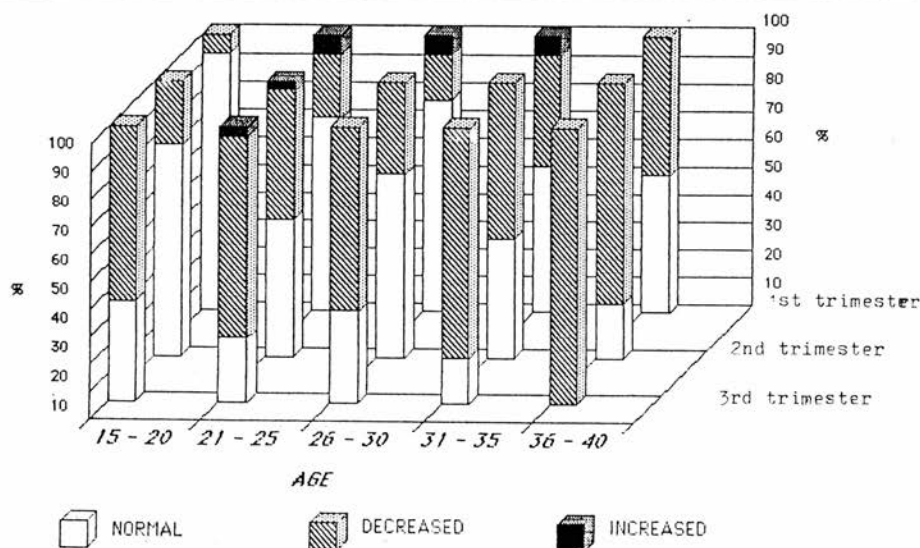
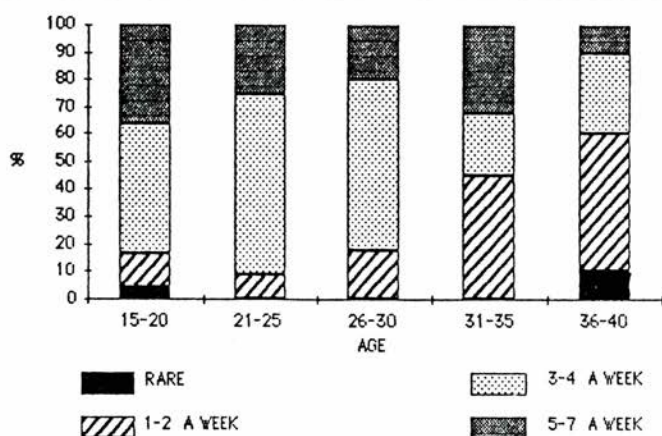


Table 3 a. — Frequency of coitus before pregnancy. 1-2 a week: A-D  $p < 0.05$ ; A-E  $p < 0.05$ ; B-D  $p < 0.05$ ; B-E  $p < 0.01$ ; C-D  $p < 0.05$ ; C-E  $p < 0.05$ ; 3-4 week: A-B  $p < 0.05$ ; A-C  $p < 0.05$ ; A-E  $p < 0.05$ ; B-D  $p < 0.05$ ; B-E  $p < 0.01$ ; C-D  $p < 0.01$ ; C-E  $p > 0.05$  in other cases.



(80%; 32 cases) while decreasing less evidently in group A (24%; 6 cases) (A-E  $p < 0.05$ ; B-E  $p < 0.05$ ; C-E  $p < 0.01$ ; D-E  $p < 0.05$ ).

Sexual desire also decreased in the third trimester, but with a lower frequency in group A (64%; 16 cases) while decreasing with a higher frequency in group E

(100%; 40 cases). It thus seems evident that modifications in sexual desire are very similar in groups B, C, and D, while not being similar in groups A and E.

Coitus between 3 and 7 times per week before pregnancy occurred more frequently in groups A, B, and C (table 3a) in comparison to groups D and E, but the

Table 3 b. — Frequency of coitus in pregnancy. rare A-B  $p < 0.01$ ; A-C  $p < 0.05$ ; A-D  $p < 0.01$ ; A-E  $p < 0.01$ ; 1-2 a week: A-C  $p < 0.05$ ; no vaginal coitus: A-E  $p < 0.05$ ;  $p > 0.05$  in other cases.

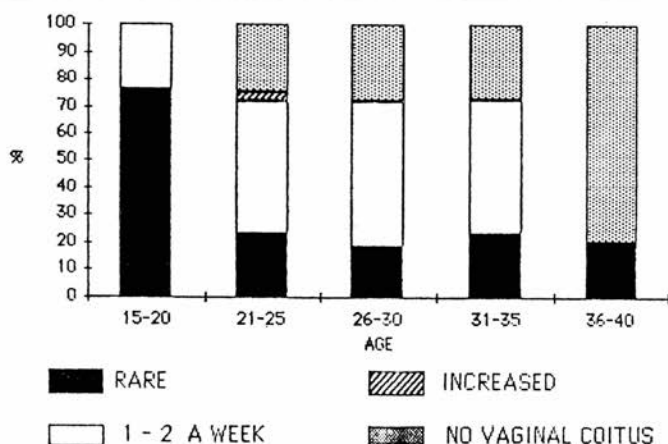
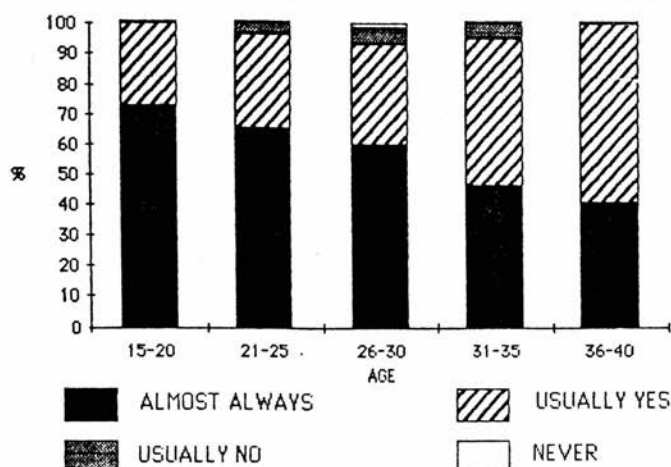


Table 4 a. — *Frequency of orgasm before pregnancy.*  $p > 0.05$  in all cases.



difference was not statistically significant. Coitus was exceptionally rare in groups A (4%; 1 case) and E (10%; 1 case) (table 3b). The frequency of coitus in pregnancy diminished in 24% (6 cases) of women in group A and more evidently in groups B (49.12%; 28 cases), and C

(54.09%; 33 cases), and D (50%; 11 cases). 80% ( cases) of the women in group E refused vaginal coitus. From 24 to 27% of cases in groups B, C, and D avoided vaginal intercourse while no one in group A did so. The frequency of "almost always" orgasm was higher be-

Table 4 b. — *Frequency of orgasm during pregnancy.*  $p > 0.05$  in all cases.

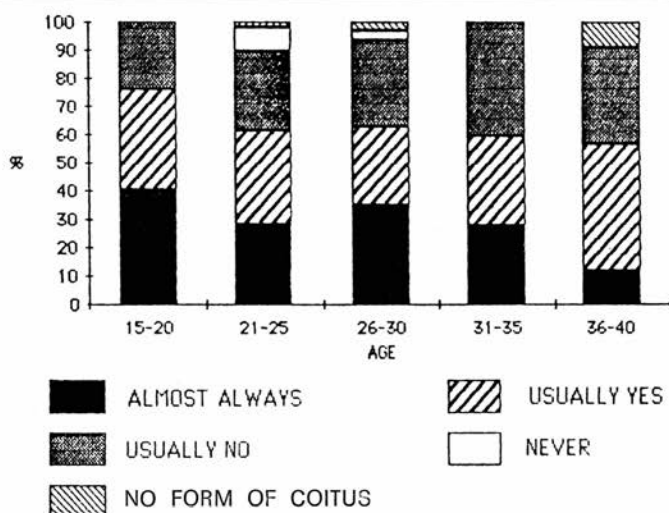
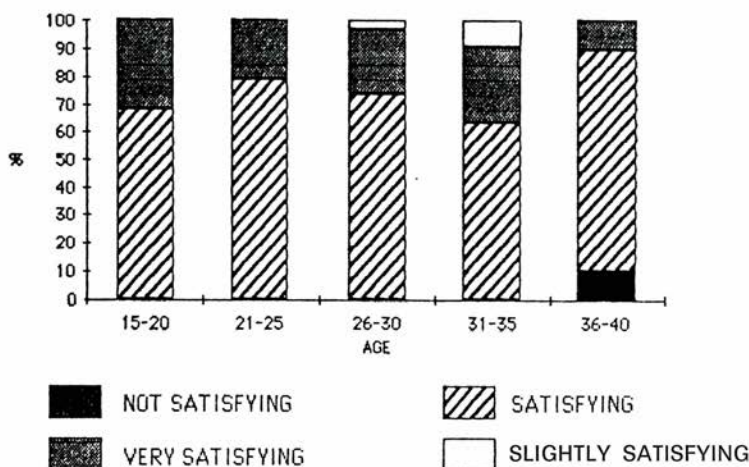




Table 5 a. — *Sexual satisfaction before pregnancy.*  $p > 0.05$  in all cases.



fore pregnancy in group A (72%; 18 cases), followed by groups B (64.91%; 37 cases), C (59.01%; 36 cases), D (45.45%; 20 cases) and E (40%; 4 cases) (table 4a).

“Usually no” orgasm was reported as being rare in groups B, C, and D. Only 1 woman in group D did not experience orgasm (1.63%; 1 case). Results were not statistically significant in the five groups. During pregnancy the fre-

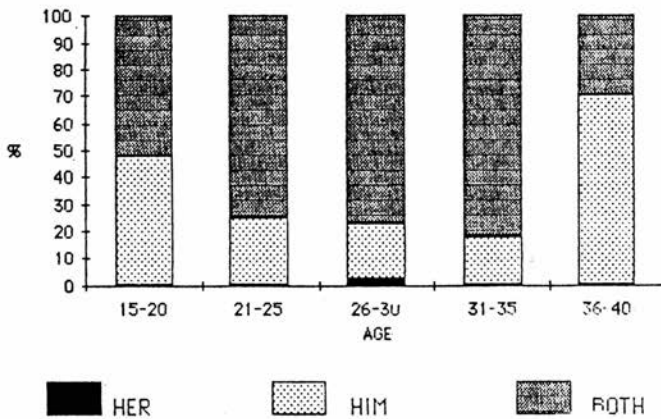
quency of “almost always” orgasm diminished with the increase of “usually no” orgasm, independent of age. The number of women who never experienced orgasm increased slightly (from 1 to 3 cases) (table 4b).

Abstinence from any form of sexual rapport occurred rarely in groups B, C, and D, and in 20% of those in group E.

Table 5 b. — *Sexual satisfaction in pregnancy.*  $p > 0.05$  in all cases.



Table 6 a. — Initiation of sexual activity before pregnancy. him B-E:  $p < 0.05$ ; C-E  $p < 0.05$ ; D-E  $p < 0.05$ ; both B-E  $p < 0.05$ ; C-E  $p < 0.01$ ; D-E  $p < 0.05$ ;  $p > 0.05$  in other cases.



There were no statistically significant differences regarding the age of the woman.

Sexual rapport before pregnancy was not satisfying in 10% (4 cases) of the women in group E, and slightly satisfying in rare women of group C (3.27%; 2 cases) and D (9.09%; 2 cases). "Satisfying" and "very satisfying" were however the prevalent responses in all age groups (table 5a). In group A there was a higher frequency of "always" orgasm. During

pregnancy there was a notable reduction in "very satisfying" sexual rapport in all age groups with an increase in unsatisfying (about 20% of cases) especially in group D (31.81%; 7 cases). Abstinence from any form of sexual activity was rare in group B, while reaching 20% in group E (8 cases) (table 5b). There were no statistically significant differences before or during pregnancy in relation to the age of the patient.

Table 6 b. — Initiation of sexual activity in pregnancy. him A-B  $p < 0.01$ ; A-C  $p < 0.05$ ; A-D  $p < 0.05$ ; A-E  $p < 0.05$ ; A-E  $p < 0.05$ ; her A-E  $p < 0.01$ ; B-E  $p < 0.01$ ; C-D  $p < 0.01$ ; A-D  $p < 0.01$ ;  $p > 0.05$  in other cases.

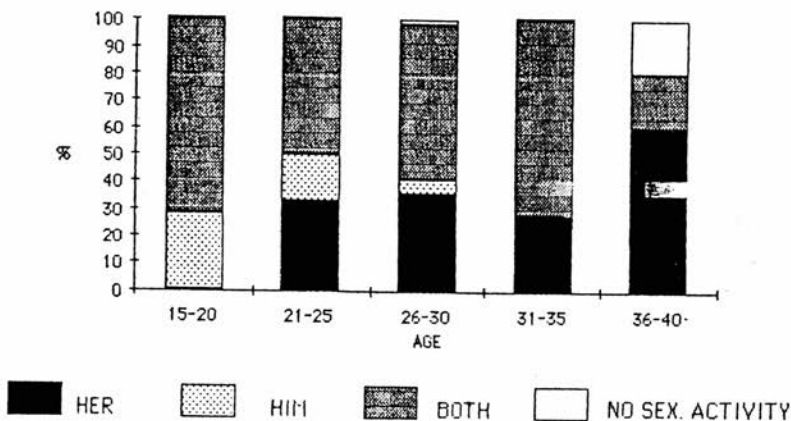


Table 7. - Age and frequency of desired pregnancy (A), unplanned psychologically accepted pregnancy (B) and unplanned psychologically unaccepted pregnancy (C).

	16-20		21-25		26-30		31-35		36-40	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	10	40	40	70.18 <sup>b</sup>	41	83.60 <sup>a</sup>	14	63.63 <sup>c</sup>	8	20 <sup>a b c</sup>
B	13	52	17	29.92	10	16.40 <sup>d</sup>	8	36.37	28	70 <sup>d</sup>
C	2	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	10
<sup>a</sup> p < 0.01		<sup>b</sup> p < 0.01		<sup>c</sup> p < 0.01		<sup>d</sup> p < 0.05				

Sexual initiative before pregnancy was assumed for the most part by the male (table 6a) with a higher frequency in group A and E in comparison to other groups. The number of women who took the first sexual initiative increased in the period during pregnancy in women more than 20 years old (table 6b) and there was a statistically significant differences between group A and the other groups.

Pregnancy was undesired and not psychologically well-accepted in a small number of cases (8% or 2 cases in group A and 10% or 4 cases in group E). Pregnancy was desired in a large number of cases in groups B, C, and D, while in groups A and E it was undesired but psychologically well-accepted (table 7).

## DISCUSSION

This study examines some aspects of sexual behavior in relation to age of the woman. In the period before pregnancy sexual activity as well as level of satisfaction is greater in younger women, independent of age; however, the woman does not take the first sexual initiative, and this is probably due to decency. In pregnancy there is a reduction of sexual activity and this is less evident in younger women, while being more evident in women in the 36 to 40 age group, who avoided vaginal coitus in 80% of cases in the third trimester of pregnancy. There is also a notable increase in the number of women who took the first sexual initiative. Sexual activity is more constant in the

mean age group and less constant in the older age group.

The higher sexual activity in younger women in relation to other groups contradicts the common theory that lack of experience in the first pregnancy negatively conditions the woman with regard to sex; on the contrary, however, it is the older women who are the ones who more often avoid coitus during pregnancy.

There was an increased frequency of unprogrammed but psychologically well-accepted pregnancies in all but the 16 to 20 age group. This datum is in correlation with the poor education of the Sicilian public with regard to contraception.

Pasini (1975) reports an increase in sexual activity in younger women in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. In our study there is a decrease of sexual activity in pregnancy, which is relatively higher in younger pregnant patients in comparison to other women.

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