

Some Selected Aspects of Psychosexual Development of Polish and Italian Women Hospitalized for High-Risk Pregnancy

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Abstract: The sexuality of a women is less known than sexuality of a man, which is due, to among others, to the fact that women report their sexual needs much less often than men. As learning how to achieve sexual satisfaction takes a different course in almost every woman, it may be the secret of various ways by means of which women may achieve erotic maturity and capability to experience orgasm.

The objective of this paper is a comparative assessment of chosen aspects of psychosexual development of pregnant women hospitalized for complications in pregnancy during 2nd and 3rd trimesters in two University Hospitals, in Rome and in Cracow. The Polish women, as compared to their Italian counterparts, proved to be more frustrated as to the level of sexual satisfaction achieved, which was accompanied by less intensive sexual needs and more frequent non-emotional choice of a husband.

The Italian women proved to be more natural and relaxed in their sexual needs and behaviours which, apart from temperamental differences, was influenced by: stronger, in this group, emotional bonds with the partner and higher level of information about sex with their partners.

Zusammenfassung: *Einige Aspekte der psychosexuellen Entwicklung von polnischen und italienischen Frauen, die wegen einer Risikoschwangerschaft stationär aufgenommen wurden. Die Sexualität der Frauen ist weniger bekannt als die der Männer, was zum Teil darin begründet*

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ist, daß Frauen über ihre sexuellen Bedürfnisse weniger oft sprechen als Männer. Der Weg zur sexuellen Befriedigung nimmt bei jeder Frau einen sehr individuellen Verlauf. Dies mag zu der Verborgenheit der Wege beitragen, auf denen Frauen erotische Reife und sexuelle Erlebnisfähigkeit erreichen.

Der Gegenstand diese Arbeit ist die vergleichende Bewertung ausgewählter Aspekte der psychosexuellen Entwicklung von Frauen, die wegen Schwangerschaftskomplikationen im zweiten und dritten Trimester in den Universitätskliniken in Rom und in Krakau stationär aufgenommen wurden. Die polnischen Frauen schienen sexuell weniger zufrieden zu sein, was verbunden war mit weniger intensiven sexuellen Bedürfnissen und einer vergleichsweise häufigeren Partnerwahl aufgrund anderer als emotionaler Motive.

Die italienischen Frauen schienen vergleichsweise in ihren sexuellen Bedürfnissen und in ihrem sexuellen Verhalten natürlicher und entspannter, wenn man von Temperamentsunterschieden absieht. Bedeutsam für diese Unterschiede war: eine vergleichsweise stärkere emotionale Verbindung mit dem Partner und ein vergleichsweise größerer Austausch über die Sexualität zwischen den Partnern.

Introduction

The sexuality of a woman is less known than the sexuality of a man, which is due, among others, to the fact that women report their sexual needs much less often than men. Nevertheless, many women gain selfconfidence only when they feel attractive and desired by men [23,9]. Human sexual needs are controlled by cerebral cortex, the respective areas of which are responsible for stimulating and inhibiting sexual activity. The studies of McLean et al. have shown that of great importance for sexual reactivity are the amygdala nuclei and the adjacent part of the temporal lobe of cortex as well as the limbic system, controlling human emotional life [7,8]

A very important role in the control of sexual activity is also played by the hypothalamus in which nervous stimuli are merged with the hormonal stimuli. The confirmation of the role of hypothalamus in sexual activities is provided by the works of R. Klimek who in 1966 discovered the system of changes occurring in the hypothalamus after pathological pregnancy, the so called postgestational hypothalamic syndrome, which is characterized, among others, by disturbance of the sexual needs [4].

As learning how to achieve sexual satisfaction takes a different course in almost every woman, it may be the secret of various ways by means of which women may achieve erotic maturity and capability to experience orgasm. In the course of learning, the intensity of woman's sexual satisfaction increases gradually up to the age of around 30, when chances of experiencing a deep orgasm are the highest. After 40, this intensity drops down and after 60 its level is significantly lower [2,9,11].

Therefore, sexual maturation in a woman precedes much more slowly than in a man. Slow learning to experience orgasm in women may also be related to various sexual inhibitions acquired in the course of rigorous upbringing in which orders and prohibitions were of primary importance [3,9,10].

The objective of this paper is a comparative assessment of chosen aspects of psychosexual development of pregnant women hospitalized for complications in pregnancy during 2nd and 3rd trimesters in two University Hospitals, in Rome and in Cracow.

Material and Methods

The prospective study covered two groups of women, each consisting of 50 pregnant patients hospitalized at the OB/GYN Departments of University Hospitals in Cracow and in Rome from 1992-09-01 to 1993-10-01 for complications in pregnancy during 2nd and 3rd trimesters.

In both groups under study indications for hospitalization were shown in Table 1. The average age in the whole group under study was 29.4 ± 4.1 years, ranging from 18 to 44, in which for Polish women it was 28.2 ± 3.8 ranging from 19 to 42 and for Italian women 31.3 ± 4.1 ranging from 18 to 44. Sixty five (65%) per cent of the whole group under study were Office workers, and 71% lived in urban areas. They stayed at the Departments for 5–90 days and a mean durations of stay was 17.66 days (In Rome – 19.72 days, in Cracow – 15.60 days).

The basic study method was a standardised psychological interview consisting of 40 categories – identical for both groups. Each category described the tested behaviour in five possible variants.

Taken for data analysis were these categories of the interview which concerned of patients their attitudes towards the psychosexual developments.

The standardised psychological interview used in the studies promoted good contact with the pregnant women, which considering the intimate problems involved ensured collecting of genuine and valuable material.

Results and Discussion

To majority of tested pregnant women (65%) their husband was not the first sexual partner in life. Earlier sexual contacts of the tested women had not involved a regular relationship with one partner and consisted of occasional intercourses with many different partners. To most women (90%) sexual life had been and is something natural, needed for health and well-being. The natural role of sex and its importance in a woman's life was more often stressed by the tested women from Rome (95%) than by the Polish women (80%), ($\chi^2 = 16.48$, $p < 0.01$)

The statistically significant differences between the studied groups can be interpreted as the effect of different educational systems in the two countries, different customs and also some temperamental differences. The above results point to the fact that in Italy, sex is less of a taboo, which enhances more natural and open attitudes towards sexual life.

Majority of the tested pregnant women in both groups had achieved a high level of sexual satisfaction in their relationships (63%) and considered their marriage to successful (89%). In the Polish group however, there were far more women (46%) who compared to their Italian counterparts (29%) expressed dissatisfaction with their relationships and such who claimed they experienced no orgasm ($\chi^2 = 18.78$, $p < 0.001$).

The women under study reported that when they were maturing sexually they mainly learned about sex from popularized scientific literature (56%). It is worth noting that in the whole group only 11% of patients obtained information about sex from their parents. Still, the majority of tested women (82%) thought that the knowledge they had on sex was quite sufficient.

Table 1. Indication for hospitalization.

| Indication for hospitalization of pregnant women | from Rome | from Cracow |
|--|-----------|-------------|
| 1. Arterial hypertension | 12 cases | 15 cases |
| 2. Threatening preterm labour | 10 cases | 11 cases |
| 3. IUGR | 8 cases | 7 cases |
| 4. Diabetes | 8 cases | 7 cases |
| 5. Infertilitas | 7 cases | 6 cases |
| 6. Others | 5 cases | 4 cases |

It is nevertheless surprising that only 51% of the tested pregnant women see a strong positive relation between the level of sexual satisfaction achieved by them and the preparation for sex in the form of the information obtained. The more accurate analysis of these data revealed statistically significant differences between the studied groups ($\chi^2 = 8.87$, $p < 0.01$). Polish women, more often than Italian women got information about sex from their parents or teachers, while the later obtained such information mainly from their sexual partners. It is amazing that such source of sexual information has not appeared at all in the group of tested Polish patients.

Better evaluation of the relationship between the source and scope of information about sex and the level of sexual satisfaction achieved observed in the group of Italian women ($\chi^2 = 14.19$, $p < 0.01$) as well as a higher level of satisfaction from sex found in the same group, suggest that discussing about sex with a mature partner facilitates better adaptation of partners and the resulting higher satisfaction drawn from sex. One can also suspect that in the case of Polish women, information about sex obtained from parents or teachers, mostly due to its conservative nature or form (arising fear of feeling of guilt) might help develop attitudes lowering the capability of Polish women to achieve full sexual satisfaction. The exchange of information about their sexual behaviours with a partner, which was the case in the Italian women studied, could have significantly widened their practical knowledge of their partner's expectations, sex techniques and mutual attractiveness in this important sphere of human life. It has long been known that, particularly in women, their sexual attractiveness constitutes an important element of their self-assessment [2,3,9].

Another, also important factor in assessment of the sexual satisfaction level in the tested group was the motivation used in choosing a partner. In choosing their husbands, patients of both groups were mostly led by the feelings of love and fascination (91%). The Italian women got married solely because of emotional involvement, while Polish women more often considered the opinion and pressure of their family or made their decisions under the influence of negative emotions (fear of loneliness, of staying unmarried, of being rejected etc.) $\chi^2 = 13.30$, $p < 0.01$.

The results obtained allow to make a conclusion about an immense importance of emotional factors in experiencing sex and achieving full satisfaction from it. This conclusion finds full confirmation in the test results of pregnant Italian women.

As previously expected, the tested Italian women, when compared to Polish women, valued more highly the intensity of their sexual needs and gave them higher rank in their family life ($\chi^2 = 7.61, p < 0.05$). This fact can be interpreted, among others, as the result of temperamental differences (different climatic zone) but also as the result of more satisfying sex life of the Italian that of the Polish women. It can be concluded that in the Italian women open cooperation and understanding with the partner to whom they were attached by positive emotions was combined with satisfaction from sexual relationship, medium or strong sexual needs and high assessment of their own sexual attractiveness.

Majority of the tested women (78%) valued their sexual attractiveness as average (44%) or very high (34%). Only 17% of them claimed they were not enough sexually attractive. Self-evaluation as a sexual partner, from the psychological point of view, testifies to common and sometimes intensified needs of acceptance by the opposite sex, the expression of which, among others, is the feeling of own attractiveness. It is therefore a very subjective evaluation but it is of real importance in self-assessment. [3,5,6,9]

The studied pregnant women had higher opinion of themselves in the role of a wife. Majority of them (62%) claimed that they fulfilled their duties as wives without any reservations which means that they are comfortable in this role, having the feeling of fulfillment of all their family duties and taking satisfaction from family life.

Considerably high assessment of own sexual attractiveness among the tested Polish women along with relatively low, as compared to the Italian women, level of sexual satisfaction and the medium sexual needs found in this group, can suggest they hold their partner guilty of lack of full sexual satisfaction. Achievement of sexual satisfaction, orgasm included, is conditioned by various factors among which an important role is played by positive sexual experience accumulated through the process of learning such reactions which a woman gradually acquires in her sexual life. It is obvious that in this process of learning how to experience sex, a crucial role, in both positive and negative sense, is played by a woman's sex partner [1,3,9,12].

Conclusions

1. The studied group of pregnant women was characterised by open attitudes towards the matters of sex, treating them as a natural manifestation of emotional life, prevailing emotional motives in the choice of a partner, satisfaction from sex and married life, medium sexual needs and positive self-assessment in the role of a sex partner and a wife.
2. The Polish women under study, as compared to their Italian counterparts, proved to be more frustrated as to the level of sexual satisfaction achieved, which was accompanied by less intensive sexual needs and more frequent non-emotional choice of a husband.
3. The Italian women proved to be more natural and relaxed in their sexual needs and behaviours, which, apart from temperamental differences, was influenced by: stronger, in this group, emotional bonds with the partner and higher level

of information about matters of sex, including also exchange of information about sex with their partners.

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