

The Changes of Sexuality in Thai Women during Pregnancy

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Objective: To determine the changes of sexuality during pregnancy in Thai women and to explore their attitudes and sources of information concerning sexuality during pregnancy.

Material and Method: Three hundred and sixty pregnant women who met the study criteria were recruited. Women at each trimester ($n = 120$) were interviewed with a structured questionnaire whether their sex desire, coital frequency and orgasmic rate decreased, increased or remained unchanged as compared with the pre-pregnancy period. The change in their favorite sexual position, concerns about sexual intercourse during pregnancy, and their sources of information regarding sexuality were also determined.

Results: The pregnant women at each trimester reported a gradual and significant decrease in sexual desire ($p < 0.05$) and coital frequency ($p < 0.05$). The change in orgasmic rate was not statistically significant ($p = 0.06$). Generally the preferred sexual position was "man on top" however, this gradually and significantly changed to "rear position" in each trimester of pregnancy ($p < 0.05$). Fifty nine percent of the women thought they could have sexual intercourse; however, 79.7% of them were concerned about sexual intercourse during pregnancy. The main concern was the potential harm to the fetus. Sixty two percent of pregnant women received information about sexuality during pregnancy from their health physicians.

Conclusion: Sexuality decreased significantly throughout pregnancy in Thai women. The majority of pregnant women are concerned about the adverse effects of sexual intercourse on pregnancy outcomes. Therefore, sexuality during pregnancy should be clearly counseled to all couples to reassure that sexual intercourse in normal pregnancy is safe.

Keywords: Sexuality, Pregnancy

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It is generally accepted that pregnancy, a time of physical and psychological change in conjunction with cultural, social, religious, and emotional influence, may affect sexuality⁽¹⁾. Many studies concerning sexuality in pregnancy were performed more than two decades ago in Western population^(2,3). These changes included sexual desire, coital frequency, and coital orgasm. They were observed during pregnancy and compared to pre-pregnancy period. Because of changes in attitudes towards sexuality in pregnancy, study size, and a bias study design, the implication of the study

results may be limited. Furthermore, there are few studies about this issue recently^(1,4). This study aimed to evaluate sexuality in Thai pregnant women by interviewing pregnant women at each trimester to compare the level of sexuality and sexual activity between their present trimester and pre-pregnancy. Main outcome measures were sexual desire, coital frequency, orgasmic rate, their favorite sexual position, and to describe their attitudes and their sources of information regarding sexuality in pregnancy. A lack of or an incorrect recall memory might distort the results of some studies in Thai population obtained by interviewing women during postpartum period⁽⁵⁻⁷⁾. Furthermore, prospective study had a limitation for a high loss to follow up rate⁽⁸⁾. We have attempted to avoid these limitations in this study.

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Material and Method

Three hundred and sixty pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic at Maharaj Nakorn Chiang Mai hospital between May and July 2005, were consecutively recruited to the study. The inclusion criteria included: had been living with husbands for at least one year prior to pregnancy, had a reliable gestational age, and agreed to participate in the study. Women were excluded if they had any contraindication for sexual intercourse that could be harmful to pregnancy, or had been interviewed for this study before. Women at each trimester (n = 120) were interviewed, using a structured questionnaire, whether their sex desire, coital frequency and orgasmic rate decreased, increased, or remained unchanged as compared with the pre-pregnancy period. The change in the favorite sexual position, concerns about sexual intercourse during pregnancy, and their sources of information regarding sexuality during pregnancy were also determined. The three interviewers consisted of two nurses and one physician. They all passed the test for interrater reliability⁽⁹⁾ (i.e. scores > 0.9). Categorical data were ex-

pressed by percentage and comparison was made by the chi-square test.

Results

Sociodemographic characteristics of the women studied were: 79% were Chiang Mai residents, mean age 26.6 ± 5.3 , 59% were full-time employees, 50.3% had 12 years of education, the average family income per month was 11,556 baht and 96.1% were Buddhist. The women in each trimester were not statistically different of these socioeconomic characteristic. Fifty one percent of them were multiparity. The mean gestational ages at first, second, and third trimesters were 11, 23, and 35 weeks respectively.

The percentage of women reporting a decrease in their sexual desire as compared with pre-pregnancy, increased as the gestational trimesters increased ($p < 0.05$). The sex desire decreased at first, second and third trimester was 68.3%, 78.3%, and 83.3%, respectively (Fig. 1)

Before pregnancy, 56.1% of the women reported they had sexual intercourse 2-3 times per week.

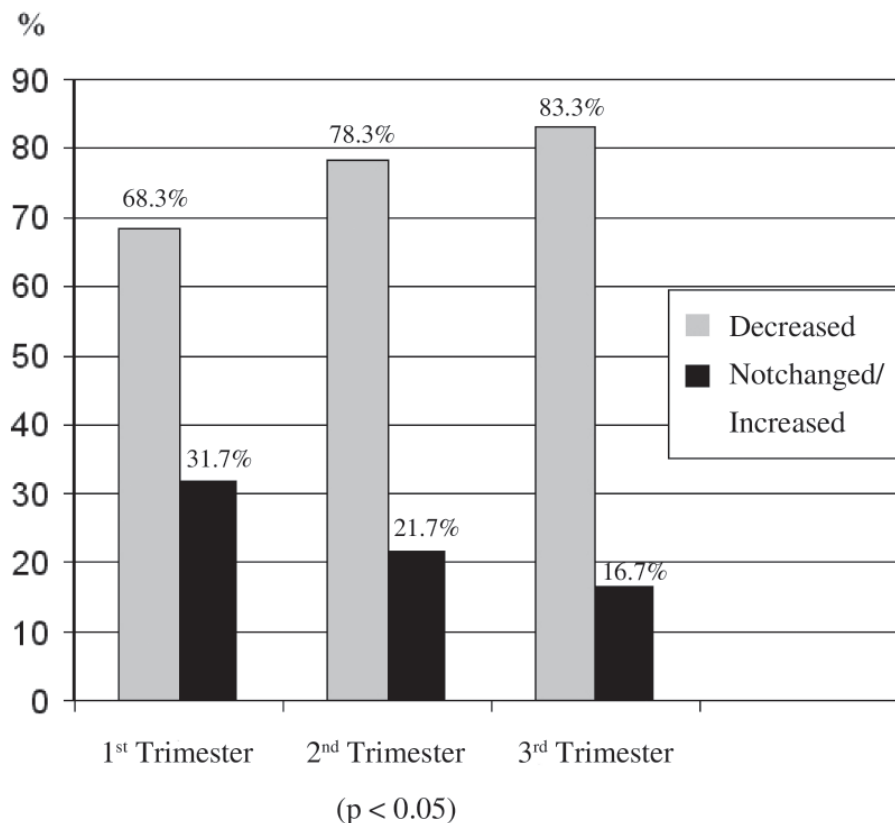


Fig. 1 Percentage changes of sexual desire comparing pre-pregnancy period and during each trimester of pregnancy

During each trimester, most women had the coital frequency of 0-1 times per week. The difference when compared the coital frequency during each trimester with pre-pregnancy was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The coital frequency of 0-1 times per week tended to increase by the trimester (Fig. 2).

Most of the women in each trimester reported a decrease in orgasmic rate. The women in the second trimester had the highest percentage of decreasing orgasmic rate, although it was not statistically significant ($p = 0.06$) (Fig. 3).

Generally, the favorite sexual position was “man on top”. “Rear position” significantly increased in preference in each trimester of pregnancy as compared with pre-pregnancy period ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 4).

Fifty nine percent of the women thought that they can have sexual intercourse during pregnancy as they normally had when they were not pregnant. However, 79.7% of them worried about sexual intercourse during pregnancy. The three most common concerns in all women regarding sexual intercourse during pregnancy are the harm to the fetus (70.8%), abortion

(59.7%), and bleeding (46.9%). All pregnant women received information involving the sexuality during pregnancy from multiple sources. 62.2% of women received from their physicians, 50.6% received from book, and 43.6% received from their friends.

Discussion

Several studies have demonstrated a decrease in sexual desire throughout the pregnancy compared to those of pre-pregnancy period^(1,7,8). However, the reduction of sexual desire was not in linear fashion in all reports. Reamy et al noted an increase in sexual desire in the second trimester compared to early pregnancy period⁽¹⁰⁾. In the present study, sex desire decreased throughout pregnancy and decreased significantly, as the pregnancy progressed. Before pregnancy, most of the women reported they had sexual intercourse 2-3 times per week. During pregnancy, most of women had the coital frequency of 0-1 time per week. Coital frequency decreased significantly when pregnancy progressed and was similar to the previous studies^(3,4,6-8,11). Orgasmic rate decreased throughout pregnancy but

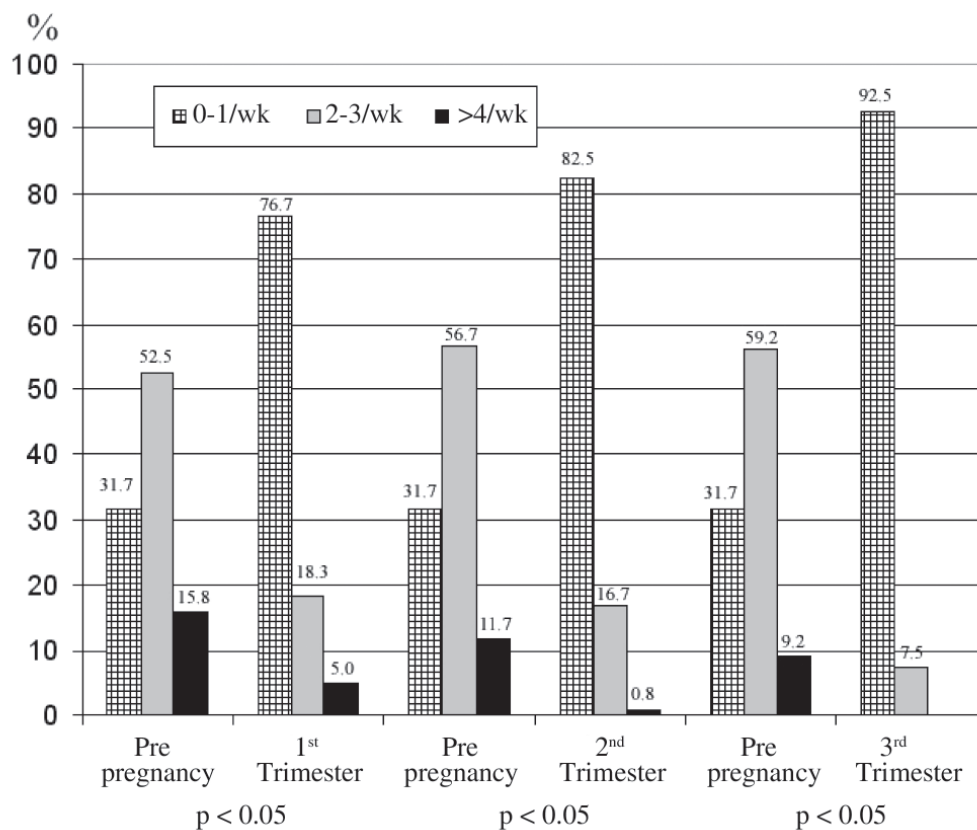


Fig. 2 Coital frequency before pregnancy and during each trimester

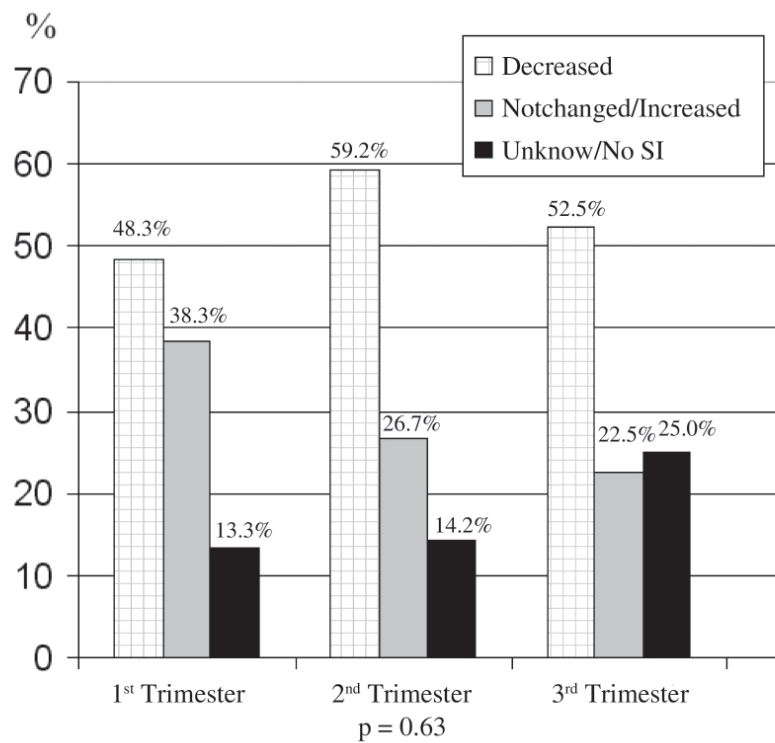


Fig. 3 Percentage changes of orgasmic rate comparing pre-pregnancy period and during each trimester of pregnancy

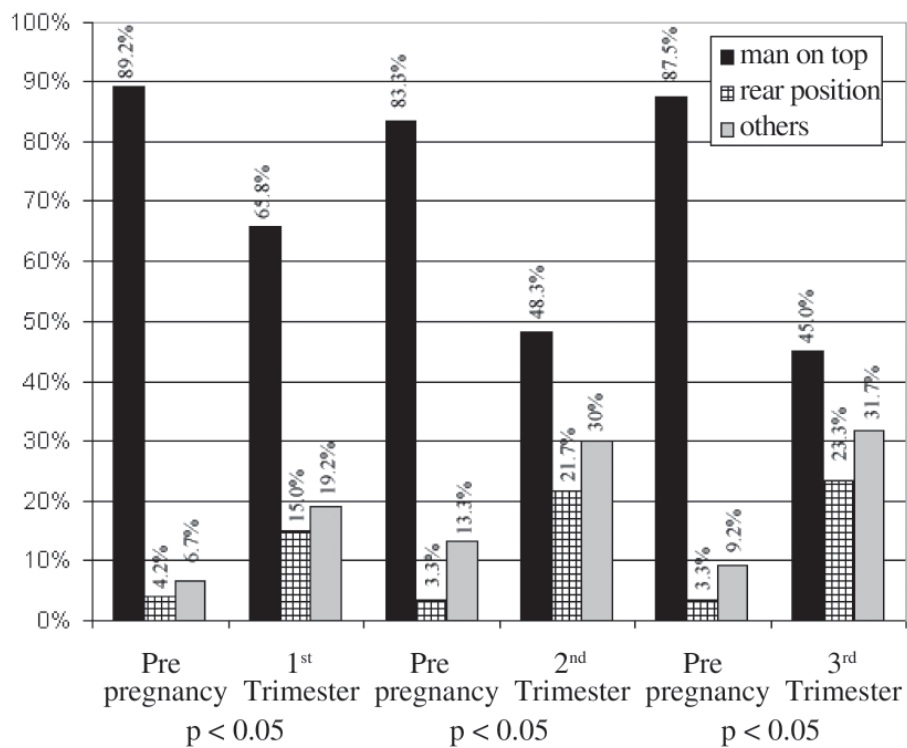


Fig. 4 The most preference sexual position before pregnancy and during each trimester

was not statistically significant, whereas the other studies reported a significant decrease⁽⁶⁻⁸⁾. This could be because our sample size was not large enough to detect the statistical differences, or the women tended to under report because of the cultural influence.

The favorite sexual position was “man on top” either before pregnancy or during pregnancy but its preference decreased significantly by trimester. The preference of “rear position “ significantly increased in each trimester of pregnancy as compared with pre-pregnancy period ($p < 0.05$). This was similar to the study done by Uwapusitanon⁽⁸⁾, which was the only study about sexual position in pregnant women.

In this study, a large number of pregnant women (79.7%) were concerned about sexual intercourse in pregnancy, although 59.4% pregnant women believed that the sexual intercourse would not harmful to pregnancy or the fetus. The most common concerns regarding sexual intercourse during pregnancy was harmful to the fetus, followed by leading to abortion, and abnormal bleeding. Several studies have demonstrated that sexual intercourse in normal pregnant women had no significant serious adverse effects, including lower genital tract infection, abortion, premature rupture of amniotic sac membrane, and preterm labor^(2,3,12-15). Therefore, it is very important that there should be a routine education to correct the misunderstandings and reassure about sexual intercourse during pregnancy. In the present study, all pregnant women received information regarding sexuality during pregnancy from various sources. The most common was from their physicians (62.2%). Although the pregnant women in our study received the information on sexuality from their physicians, more than those in the previous studies^(1,8), we still encourage the attending physicians to discuss this issue with all couples because approximately one-third of the women in our study received the information from other sources, whose accuracy could not be determined.

The limitations of this study are firstly, the women in each trimester were not the same cohort, secondly, the women might tend to under report their sexual activity to the direct interview compared to a self-administered questionnaire. This might increase the variation of the responses. In conclusion, a reduction of the sexual desire, orgasmic rate, and frequency of sexual intercourse are noted in the majority of pregnant women compared to those before pregnancy. The majority of pregnant women concerned about the adverse effects of sexual intercourse on the pregnancy outcomes. Therefore, the detailed physiological altera-

tion of pregnancy and its consequences, particularly in sexuality, should be counseled to all couples to reassure that sexual intercourse in normal pregnancy is safe.

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ความรู้สึทางเพศที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปในสตรีไทยตั้งครรภ์

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วัตถุประสงค์: ศึกษาความรู้สึทางเพศที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไปในสตรีตั้งครรภ์, ทศนคติ และแหล่งความรู้เกี่ยวกับเพศสัมพันธ์ขณะตั้งครรภ์

วัสดุและวิธีการ: สัมภาษณ์สตรีตั้งครรภ์ 360 คนโดยแบ่งเป็นไตรมาสละ 120 คนขณะมาฝากครรภ์ โดยความรู้สึทางเพศที่ศึกษาได้แก่ ความต้องการทางเพศ ความถี่ของการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ทางช่องคลอด, อัตราการถึงจุดสุดยอด และท่าที่พึงพอใจขณะมีเพศสัมพันธ์ ข้อมูลที่ได้จะนำมาวิเคราะห์เปรียบเทียบกันว่า น้อยลง, มากขึ้น หรือเท่าเดิม ระหว่างไตรมาสนั้น ๆ กับก่อนการตั้งครรภ์และศึกษาถึงทัศนคติและแหล่งข้อมูลเรื่องการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ขณะตั้งครรภ์,

ผลการศึกษา: ความต้องการทางเพศ ความถี่ของการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ลดลงอย่างมีนัยสำคัญเมื่อเทียบกับก่อนตั้งครรภ์ และลดลงอย่างมีนัยสำคัญเมื่อไตรมาสของการตั้งครรภ์เพิ่มขึ้นแต่อัตราการถึงจุดสุดยอดไม่พบการเปลี่ยนแปลงอย่างมีนัยสำคัญ พบว่าการร่วมเพศโดยการใช้ท่าที่ผู้ชายอยู่ด้านบนได้รับความนิยมมากที่สุด พบว่ามีการใช้ท่าที่หญิงคุกเข่าคลานเพิ่มขึ้นขณะตั้งครรภ์อย่างมีนัยสำคัญ และมีแนวโน้มมากขึ้นเมื่ออายุครรภ์มากขึ้น สตรีตั้งครรภ์ร้อยละ 59 คิดว่ายังสามารถมีเพศสัมพันธ์ได้ตามปกติอยู่แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม ร้อยละ 79.7 ยังมีความวิตกกังวลเกี่ยวกับการมีเพศสัมพันธ์อยู่ โดยส่วนใหญ่กลัวว่าจะเป็นอันตรายต่อทารกในครรภ์ พบว่าสตรีตั้งครรภ์ร้อยละ 62 ได้รับข้อมูลเรื่องเพศสัมพันธ์ขณะตั้งครรภ์จากแพทย์และพยาบาล

สรุป: ความรู้สึทางเพศของสตรีตั้งครรภ์ลดลงอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติ ส่วนใหญ่ยังมีความวิตกกังวลว่าการมีเพศสัมพันธ์จะเป็นอันตรายต่อการตั้งครรภ์ จึงควรมีการให้ความรู้ความเข้าใจเพื่อสร้างทัศนคติที่ถูกต้องให้แก่สตรีตั้งครรภ์และคู่สมรสทุกคนในเรื่องการมีเพศสัมพันธ์ขณะตั้งครรภ์ว่าสามารถปฏิบัติได้อย่างปกติและไม่เป็นอันตรายในสตรีตั้งครรภ์ปกติ