



*Original Research Article*

# Perception and practice of coitus during pregnancy by women attending Antenatal Care Clinic in a tertiary hospital, South East Nigeria

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\*<sup>1</sup>Obuna JA and <sup>1</sup>Eze JN

<sup>1</sup>Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Federal Teaching hospital, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

\*Corresponding Author E-mail: Obuna2003@yahoo.com

Tel.:+2348035763952

To determine how pregnant women in this part of the world perceive and practice coitus during pregnancy and factors that influence their perception and practice. A- five months cross-sectional study of randomly selected 1,950 Antenatal women attendees, married in a monogamous setting between March 1, 2015 to July 31, 2015. 76.5% of pregnant women perceive coitus during pregnancy as bad and unacceptable. The prevalence of coitus during pregnancy was 29.8%. The commonest reason for avoiding coitus during pregnancy was fear of harm/hurt to the fetus (19.9%), while satisfying husband (23.8%) and keeping him away from other women (20.9%) were the main reasons for engaging in coitus during pregnancy. Women with higher education were more likely to practice coitus during pregnancy (45.6% with tertiary education compared to 15.5% with none formal education). Pregnant women accepted coitus better at second trimester (48.4%) while they were more afraid to engage in coitus during first trimester. Ninety percent of the respondents admitted that avoidance of coitus during pregnancy was a frequent cause of marital disharmony. The perception and practice of coitus during pregnancy by our pregnant women are poor. Fear of harm/hurt to the fetus, women's education and gestational age influence the perception and practice of coitus during pregnancy. There is the need to include sexual education not only in our Antenatal education but also in our educational curriculum as well as our religious and community women's organizations/groups.

**Key words:** Pregnant women, perception, practice, coitus, antenatal clinic

## INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy and Childbirth mark a distinct period in the life of a woman<sup>1</sup>. Sexual intercourse can be negatively influenced by pregnancy (Adinma, 1995).

Hormonal alteration, changes in the body physiology/anatomy as well as psycho-social changes are responsible<sup>2</sup>. Fear of hurting the fetus and miscarriage as well as loss of sexual pleasure are main reasons for avoiding sexual intercourse during pregnancy(Adinma, 1995); (Jessica, 2010).

In most pregnant women, the loss of sexual pleasure is more during the first and third trimester (Jessica, 2010).

While fatigue, emotional lability, nausea/vomiting as well as breast discomfort among other factors are mainly responsible for loss of sexual interest, the general body aches and increased in abdominal size account for decreased libido during the third trimester.

Pregnant women are usually more energetic and erotic with increased libido during second trimester (Jessica, 2010). This is because of the loss of most factors in the first trimester which make the woman uncomfortable as well as increased blood flow to the vagina resulting in increased tendency for orgasm(Jessica, 2010); Folasade et al.(2011).

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics, N=1,923

Age(yrs.)	Number	%
<16	0	0
16-20	31	1.6
21-25	306	15.9
26-30	583	30.3
31-35	604	31.4
36-40	323	16.8
41-45	76	4.0
>45	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1923</b>	<b>100</b>

  

Parity	Number	%
0	264	13.7
1-4	1091	56.8
≥5	568	29.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>1923</b>	<b>100</b>

  

Social Class <sup>10</sup>	Number	%
1	225	11.7
2	216	11.2
3	554	28.8
4	547	28.5
5	381	19.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1923</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2.** Practice of sexual intercourse in index pregnancy, N= 1,923

Practice	Number	%
Yes	574	29.8
No	1349	70.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1923</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The need to be faithful to one’s partner has been advocated as a way of reducing the human immuno-deficiency virus (HIV) prevalence. Starving men sexually by their spouses for nine months or more negate this principle of HIV prevention (Naim and Bhutto, 2000).

Studies show that about 28% of Nigerian men and 4-28% of men globally engage in extramarital sexual intercourse during pregnancy, thereby putting the couples at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV infections (Folasade et al., 2011; Orji et al. 2002; Adeyemi et al., 2005).

This study is aimed at examining how pregnant women in this part of the world perceive and practice coitus during pregnancy and determine factors that influence their perception and practice.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

One thousand, nine hundred and fifty (1,950) married, pregnant women attending Antenatal Care Clinic (ANC) at

Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki (FETHA) were randomly selected and served semi-structured questionnaires. The educated women among the respondents filled the questionnaires without support after how to answer it was explained to them. The non-educated respondents were assisted by trained research assistants who were mainly the medical students and midwives. The research assistants explained the questions to the women and they gave the answers which were entered in the questionnaires by the research assistants.

Single pregnant women and pregnant women from polygamous families were excluded. One thousand, nine hundred and twenty three women (1,923) correctly filled and returned their questionnaires (Table 1). The study lasted for five months (March 1 –July 31, 2015). Information on socio-demographic characteristics, gestational age, perception of coitus, practice of coitus, reasons for practice of coitus or avoidance of coitus as well as the prevalence of sexual intercourse during pregnancy, were obtained and analyzed using SPSS version 10.0.

**RESULTS**

The total number of respondents analyzed was 1,923. All the participants were above 16 years of age. The mean age was 26±7 (2SD). Para 1-4 was 1091 in number (56.8%). Grandmultiparae were 568 in number (29.5%), while the rest were primigravidae. Only 11.7% and 11.2% were in social classes one and two respectively, 19.8% fell within social class five while the majority of the women were in social classes three and four (28.8%, 28.5%) respectively.

Out of the 1, 923 women who correctly filled their questionnaires, 1,471 (76.5%) perceived sexual intercourse during pregnancy as bad and unacceptable. Only 29.8 % (574) practiced coitus in index pregnancy (Table 2).

Commonest reason for not practicing coitus was fear of harm/hurt to the fetus (19.9%) while the least reason was medical advice to abstain. The main reasons for practice were to satisfy husband (23.8%) and keep him from following other women (20.9%). Ninety point eight percent (90.8%) of respondents agreed that avoidance of coitus during pregnancy was a frequent source of marital disharmony (Table 3, 4 and 5).

The higher the education of the woman, the more likelihood of her accepting coitus during pregnancy: 45.6% of women with tertiary education accepted coitus during pregnancy with only 15.5% rejecting it compared to only 2.1% of women with none formal education accepting coitus during pregnancy and as high as 20.9% of the same group rejecting it (Table 6).

Women at a gestational age between 14 and 28 weeks were likely to accept coitus during pregnancy (48.4%) while women at a gestational age below 13 weeks were more afraid to consent to coitus during pregnancy (Table 7).

Among the 574 women who practiced coitus during pregnancy, 50.3% were para one to four, 30.7% were grandmultiparae while the rest were primigravidae. The

**Table 3.** Reasons for avoiding coitus in pregnancy

Reasons	Number	%
Painful/discomfort	376	15.2
Does not enjoy it	403	16.3
Fear of hurt to fetus	492	19.9
Cultural taboo	288	11.6
Religious	183	7.4
Husband doesn't like it	94	3.8
Ignorance that it is possible	215	8.7
Dislike the idea	397	16.0
Medical reasons	28	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2476</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 4.** Reasons for coitus in pregnancy

Reasons	Number	%
Enjoys it	349	13.3
To satisfy husband	622	23.8
Keep husb from other wm	547	20.9
Fear of HIV through husb	491	18.8
Good for the fetus	321	12.3
Obligation to husband	289	10.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>2617</b>	<b>100.0</b>

N/B husb=husband, wm=woman

**Table 5.** Sources of knowledge about coitus in pregnancy

Sources	Number	%
ANC	1035	44.2
Radio/TV	76	3.2
Print media	102	4.4
Seminars	299	12.8
Religious gathering	448	19.2
Schools	81	3.5
Women meeting	211	9.0
No knowledge	87	3.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>2339</b>	<b>100.0</b>

relationship between parity and coitus was not statistically significant,  $P < 0.05$

## DISCUSSION

Many studies have shown reduced coitus during pregnancy as was demonstrated by this study Adinma (1995); Jessica (2010); Folasade et al.(2011), Naim and Bhutto (2000) and Orji et al. (2002). Other studies have also shown that fear of harm/hurt to the fetus was the main reason for avoiding coitus during pregnancy (Jessica, 2010) ;Akhamis et al. (2007).

The study by Orji et al. (2002) in South west Nigeria showed that 12.0% of pregnant women avoid coitus due to fear of hurt to the fetus. Our study showed 19.9%. The

difference may be due to higher socio-economic/educational class in the study carried out by Orji in the Western part of Nigeria. Low socio-economic class is associated with increased tendency to reject or avoid sexual intercourse during pregnancy which is also demonstrated in our study (Jessica (2010).

Other studies show various reasons for avoiding coitus as shown by our study. Jessica (2010) implicated physical discomfort as the main reason for avoiding coitus during pregnancy, our study indicated that fear of harm/hurt to the fetus was the main reason for avoiding coitus. Population, cultural as well as educational differences may be responsible for these variations in the results (Olusanya et al., 1985).

This study showed that the higher the education of the woman the higher the likelihood of coitus during pregnancy. This may be due to exposure and better information. This study agrees with other works that women are more likely to accept and practice coitus in second trimester (Adinma,1995); Jessica (2010); Akhamis et al. (2007); Erol et al.(2007); Fok et al. (2005).

In the study carried out in South Western Nigeria, 20% of pregnant women engaged in coitus during pregnancy to avoid marital disharmony and this is similar to our study (23.8%)(Folasade et al., 2011).

In the work by Orji et al. (2002) only 3% engage in coitus to keep husband from following other women. This is lower than our study (20.9%). The reason for the difference is the polygamous nature of men in this part of Nigeria. Men in this part of Nigeria are more polygamous because of their occupation, mainly peasant farming, where more wives and children are needed for the labour.

In our study, only 13.3% engage in coitus in pregnancy because they enjoy it. In the work by Adinma, 46.1% engage in it because they enjoy it. In the studies by Orji et al. (2002) and Adinma, (1995) the perception of coitus during pregnancy tilted positively while ours is tilted negatively. Education, exposure and religio-cultural differences in the population studied may be responsible for the varied results.

## CONCLUSION

The perception and practice of coitus during pregnancy by our pregnant women are poor. Fear of harm/hurt to the fetus, women's education and gestational age influence the perception and practice of coitus during pregnancy. There is the need to include sexual education not only in our Antenatal education but also in our educational curriculum as well as our religious and community women's organizations/groups.

Evaluation of men's perception and practice is necessary.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this manuscript.

**Table 6.** Relationship between education & coitus during pregnancy. N=1,923

<b>Coitus / Education</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>1°</b>	<b>2°</b>	<b>3°</b>	<b>Total</b>
Yes	12 (2.1%)	99 (17.3%)	201 (35%)	262 (45.6%)	574
No	282 (20.9%)	477 (35.4%)	380 (28.2%)	210 (15.5%)	1349
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>576</b>	<b>581</b>	<b>472</b>	<b>1923</b>

N/B: 1. 1°=primary education, 2°= Secondary education, 3°= Tertiary education.  
2. The higher the education, the higher the likelihood of coitus in pregnancy

**Table 7.** Relationship between coitus in pregnancy and Gestational age(GA). N=1,923

<b>Coitus</b>	<b>GA (wks)</b>				<b>Total</b>
	<b>&lt;13</b>	<b>14-28</b>	<b>29-37</b>	<b>&gt; 37</b>	
Yes	11 (1.9%)	278 (48.4%)	223 (38.9%)	62 (10.8%)	574
No	27 (2%)	163 (12.1%)	679 (50.3%)	480 (35.6%)	1349
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>902</b>	<b>542</b>	<b>1923</b>

N/B: 1. GA (wks.) = Gestational age in weeks  
2. Women between GA 14-28 weeks are likely to accept and practice coitus during pregnancy.

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