

# THE FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE QUALITY OF WOMEN'S SEXUAL FUNCTION DURING THE FIRST YEAR AFTER DELIVERY IN GREECE : A CROSS - SECTIONAL STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexual dysfunction after childbirth has been related to the number of vaginal births, the mode of delivery, and to the severity of perineal trauma<sup>(1-4)</sup>. The present cross-sectional study was designed to identify the factors that affect the quality of women's sexual function during the first year after childbirth in Greece.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

We constructed an 81-item questionnaire that was posted online via the social media from February-April 2021. Women residing in Greece who had delivered more than 4wks ago but not more than 12mo ago were considered eligible for the study. Data that was collected included patients’ demographics, and data regarding their labor and childbirth. Information on their sexual life before, during and after pregnancy was also collected and the Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI) was used to quantify the sexual function of women during the 4 wks prior to answering the questionnaire (score range:0-36, with a cut-off of 26). After data collection statistical analysis was applied.

## RESULTS

In total **441 women** were included in the study with a mean age of  $32.5 \pm 4.4$  years old. Approximately half of women delivered 6 mo ago and 55.2% were first time mothers. The cesarean delivery rate in the total sample was 47.9%, and only 34.2% had a spontaneous vaginal birth. At childbirth, more than 85% of women sustained perineal trauma, of which 39.3% had an episiotomy. During pregnancy 76% of women had sexual intercourse with their partners, with half of them having a frequency of 2-3 times a month. The mean score of the FSFI was  $21.8 \pm 10.7$ , thus indicating a generalized sexual dysfunction (Table 1). There was a significant correlation of sexual dysfunction postpartum with exclusive breastfeeding as noted in the literature<sup>1-4</sup> (Fig 1) mainly attributed to the limited vaginal lubrication, with increasing maternal age<sup>4</sup>, reduced number of sleeping hours<sup>5</sup>, the limited support from family environment<sup>2</sup>, and with the presence of incontinence<sup>6</sup>. Conversely, the increased frequency of sexual intercourse before and during pregnancy was correlated with a higher score of sexual function postpartum as noted in the literature<sup>1</sup>(Fig 2). Perineal trauma did not seem to affect the sexual function after childbirth in contrast with the existing literature<sup>4</sup> as well as the mode of delivery contributing to the existing debate in the literature<sup>7</sup>. Only 16% of the participants considered being fully satisfied with their sex function after childbirth, while ¼ women were not having yet sexual intercourse (Fig 3).

## CONCLUSION

We have identified factors that seem to modify the sexual function of Greek women postpartum. These factors should be taken in consideration when providing midwifery care and consultation to women and couples during and

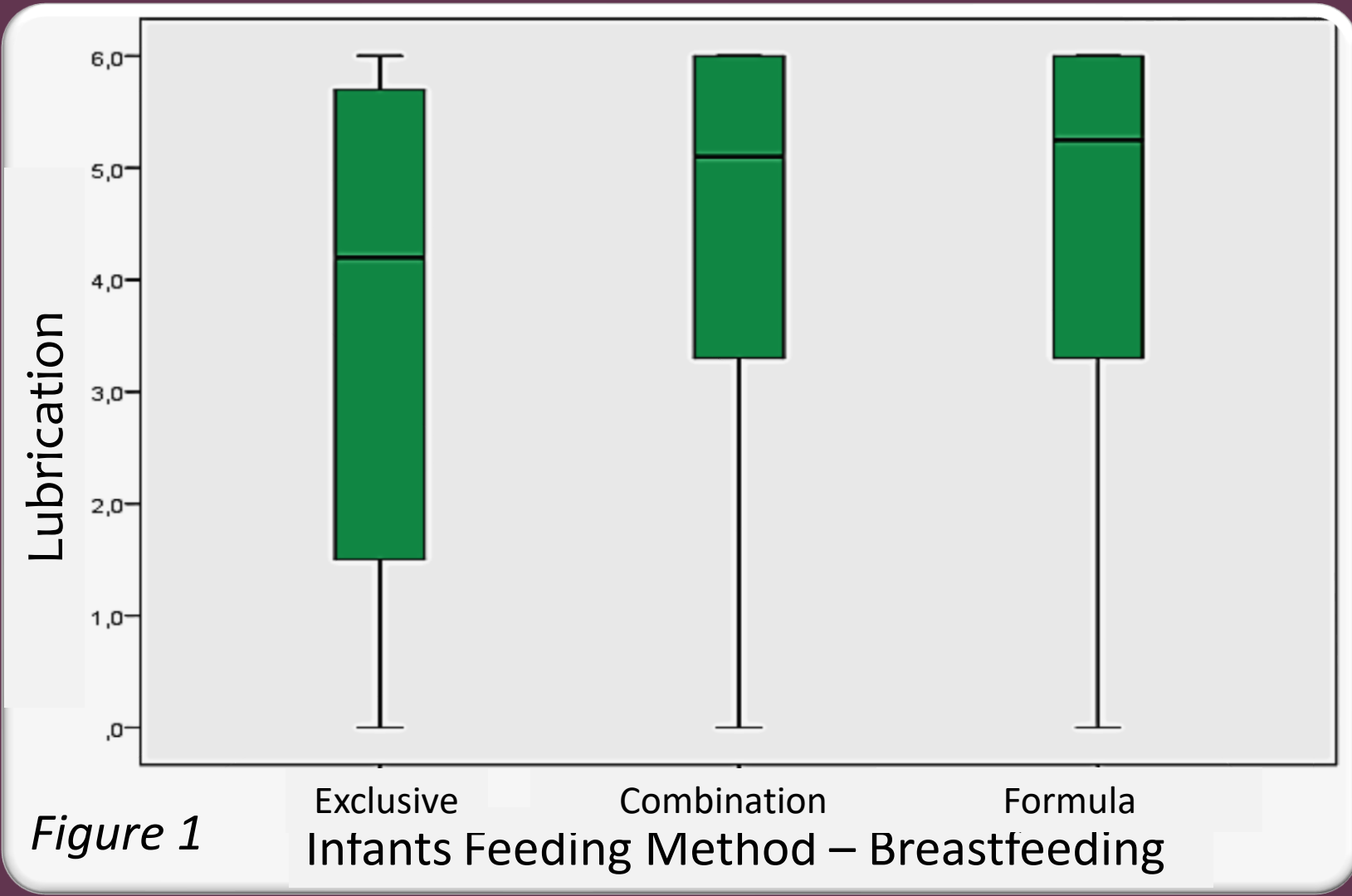


Figure 1  
Infants Feeding Method – Breastfeeding

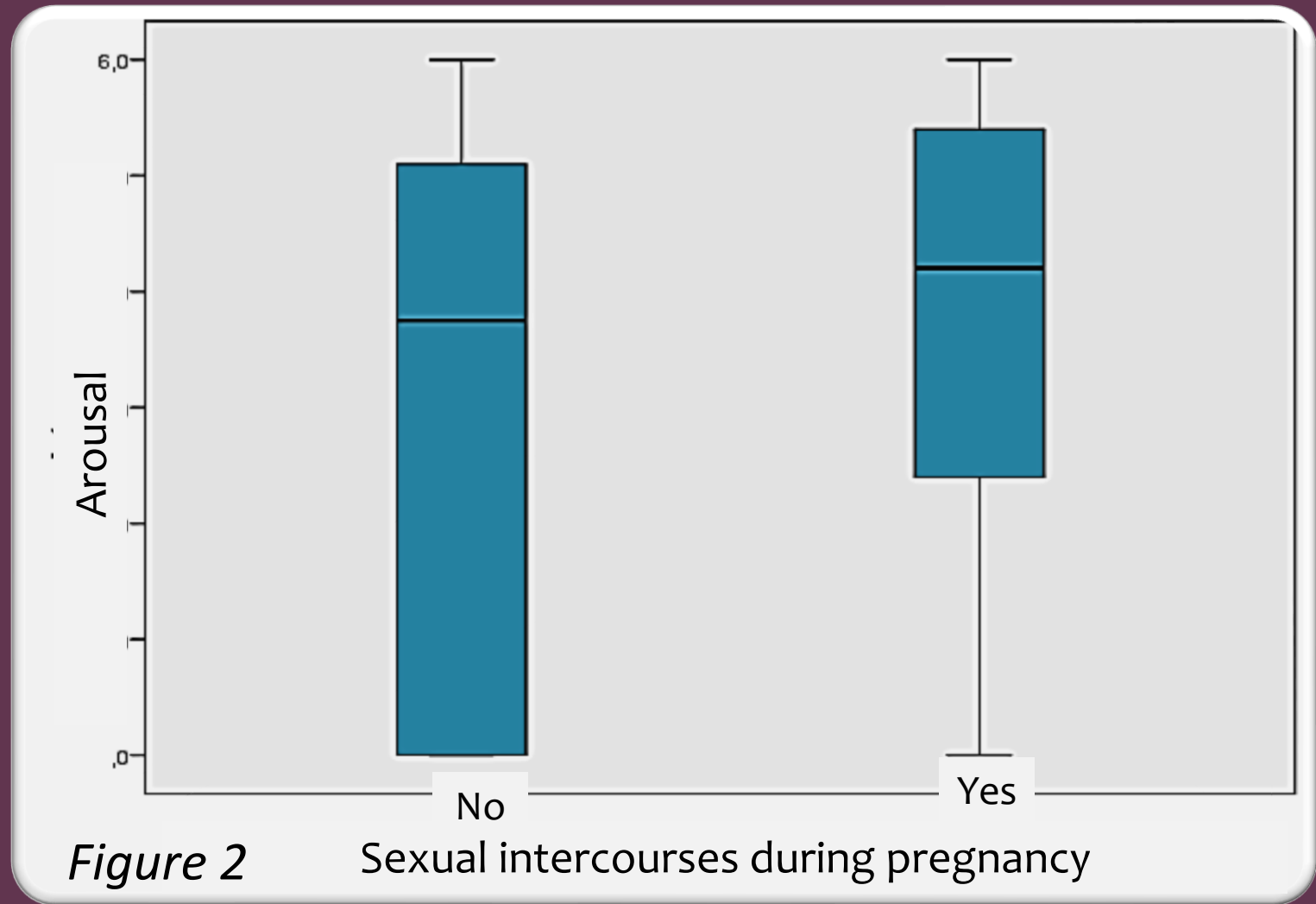


Figure 2  
Sexual intercourses during pregnancy

WOMEN’S SEXUAL FUNCTION AFTER GIVING BIRTH

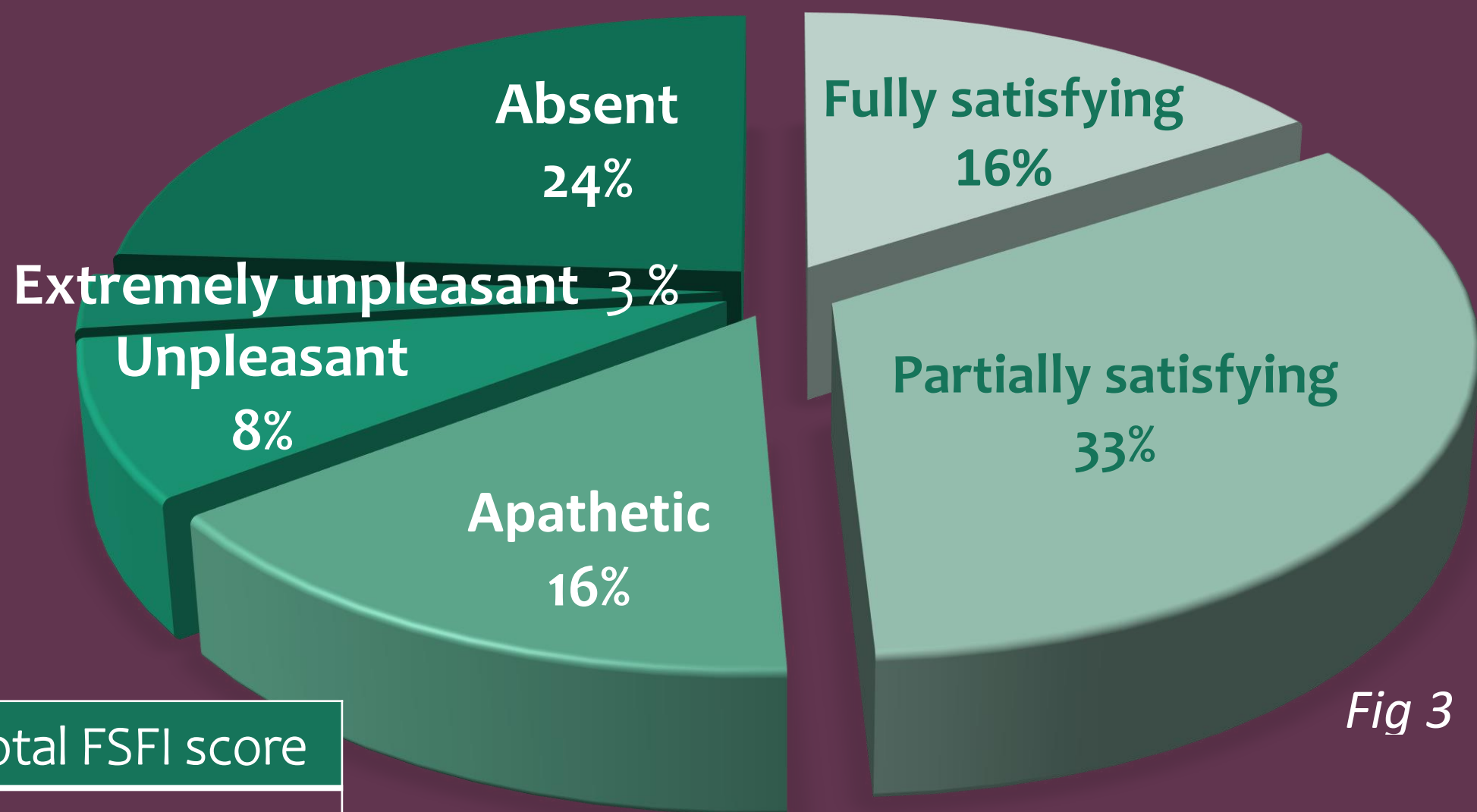


Fig 3

Table 1

|                                      | Desire      | Arousal     | Lubrication | Orgasm      | Satisfaction | Pain        | Total FSFI score |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|------------------|
| Women’s Age                          | - (p=0,006) | - (p=0,021) |             | - (p=0,027) | - (p=0,037)  |             | - (p=0,032)      |
| Constipation during pregnancy        |             |             |             | - (p=0,005) |              |             | - (p=0,038)      |
| Interval from birth                  |             | + (p<0,001) | + (p<0,001) |             | + (p=0,001)  | + (p<0,001) | + (p<0,001)      |
| Gas incontinence                     | - (p=0,009) | - (p=0,001) | - (p<0,001) | - (p<0,001) | - (p<0,001)  | - (p=0,001) | - (p<0,001)      |
| Neonatal feeding method              |             |             | (p<0,001)   |             | (p=0,014)    | (p=0,001)   | (p<0,001)        |
| Family & friend support              |             | + (p=0,005) | + (p=0,007) | + (p=0,003) | + (p=0,001)  | + (p=0,017) | + (p=0,016)      |
| Psychological condition              | (p=0,003)   | (p=0,008)   | (p=0,014)   |             | (p=0,002)    |             | (p=0,005)        |
| Partner’s parental leave             |             |             | - (p=0,034) |             |              |             |                  |
| Frequency of sexual intercourses     | +(p=0,017)  | + (p<0,045) | + (p=0,004) | + (p=0,013) | + (p=0,002)  | + (p=0,002) | + (p=0,023)      |
| Sexual intercourses during pregnancy |             | + (p<0,001) | + (p<0,001) | + (p=0,002) |              | + (p<0,001) | + (p<0,001)      |
| Satisfaction from sleep              | (p=0,017)   |             |             |             |              |             |                  |

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