

Back pain and pregnancy

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Complaints of back pain are frequent in normal pregnancy. The aims of this thesis were to describe the development and natural history of back pain during pregnancy, delivery and post partum and to evaluate the influence of several subject-related and external factors on back pain in pregnancy.

917 pregnant women were followed from the 12th week of pregnancy through delivery and for 18 months post partum. Four questionnaires were filled out during pregnancy, one at delivery and one 18 months post partum. In addition, while pregnant, each woman was asked on 9 occasions if she had back pain, and if so, additional information was obtained. The drop-out was 62 women at delivery and 38 women at the 18-months follow-up.

More than 50 percent of the women complained of back pain during pregnancy with a point-prevalence between 23 and 28 percent. The pain started early, often before the 12th week and was more intense than back pain before pregnancy. Three different pain patterns were identified by means of pain drawing; thoracic-lumbar-; and posterior pelvic pain. Pain in the symphysis pubis area was often combined with posterior pelvic pain. Several vocational factors correlated to back pain including physically heavy work, twisting, bending, and monotonous work. The presence of back pain during pregnancy was strongly associated with back problems earlier in life. Women with a back pain history complained of back pain twice as often as the other women. Further pain was more intense in these women. Multipregnancy was less important, but was also associated with pain, as was young age. Several biomechanical factors changed during pregnancy, but only one, a large abdominal sagittal diameter was correlated to back pain.

No correlations were found between back pain and any parameter recorded during delivery.

The regression of back pain was common in the first month after delivery. After this early rapid change regression almost ceased at 6 months. At 18 months post partum, 37 percent of the women had persistent back pain. Factors associated with persistent back pain were a pre-pregnancy back pain history, back pain during pregnancy, sick-leave for back pain during pregnancy, physically heavy work, and multipregnancy.

In conclusion, back pain in pregnancy was related to many factors. Some important factors were a history of back pain, vocational conditions, young age, large abdomens, and multipregnancy. Psychosocial factors were not thoroughly recorded, but were estimated to be of importance for work disabling back pain. One year after delivery 40 percent of the women had back pain.

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