

Unmet and Exceeded Expectations for Sexual Concerns across the Transition to Parenthood

Rosen et al. (2022)

What happens to relationship outcomes (e.g., conflict, satisfaction, sexual distress) when postpartum sexual expectations are exceeded (i.e., not as concerning as expected) or unmet (i.e., worse than expected)?

Method

Two hundred first-time parents completed online surveys. All were in their second trimester of pregnancy, residing in Canada or the US, and had been together for at least 6 months.



Surveys were completed 18 to 20 weeks into pregnancy, and 3-, 6-, 9-, and 12-months postpartum.

During pregnancy, partners assessed their expectations for postpartum sexual concerns, and at 3 months postpartum they were measured on their current sexual concerns. They were assessed on relationship and sexual satisfaction, relationship conflict, and sexual distress at all time points.

Results Showed That...

Mothers with exceeded sexual expectations at 3 months postpartum:

- later reported greater relationship satisfaction
- had partners who reported greater sexual satisfaction
- together with their partners reported less sexual distress and relationship conflict

When only their partner reported exceeded expectations, mothers reported less sexual distress.

When both partners reported unmet sexual expectations at 3 months postpartum, they both later reported lower sexual and relational satisfaction, and greater distress and relationship conflict.

These relational factors were not as negative when the mothers' partners alone had unmet expectations.

In Summary...

The findings suggest that whether expectations for postpartum sex are met (particularly the mother's) will affect the positivity of relationship outcomes up to 12 months postpartum.

That said, only 16% of mothers and 19% of partners reported unmet sexual expectations in our sample, suggesting that most new parents have realistic sexual postpartum expectations, or that sexual experiences postpartum are typically not as bad as expected.