

Vaginal Laxity After Childbirth: Qualitative Survey of Women’s Perceptions, Effect on Changes in Self-Image and Sexual Relationships

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Introduction

- Stretching of the vaginal introitus during childbirth may lead to permanent tissue changes resulting in loss of physical and sexual sensation during intercourse
- Although many women experience this condition, it remains for most an unnamed, unspoken and invalidated issue
- It is rarely discussed between patients and physicians possibly due to the lack of evidence-based treatment, embarrassment and lack of recognition of the condition

Purpose of Survey

- To understand the attitudes, beliefs, emotions and physical consequences resulting from laxity of the vaginal introitus in order to determine level of interest in a vaginal tightening procedure
- To identify barriers to communication with healthcare providers

Methods

- Nine focus groups were conducted; 3 in Portland, OR, 3 in Cleveland, OH and 3 in Atlanta, GA each with 6-8 women per group. A total of 50 women participated
- Screened participants were women aged 25-45 who had at least one vaginal delivery and self-reported changes in vaginal sensitivity and/or tone

Main Outcome Measures

- Qualitative analysis of perceptions and concerns of women presenting with vaginal laxity after vaginal childbirth and their attitudes toward resolution of this medical condition

Key Findings

Overall, women acknowledge their laxity, it is a real medical concern for them but they don’t talk about it

- Although women experience and acknowledge vaginal laxity, the condition remains an un-named, un-validated and an unspoken topic for discussion with their OB/GYN
- Without medical support, open discussions with friends and lack of communication with sexual partners, women feel they are “suffering in silence” with this condition

Demographic	Respondents
Age	25-45 years old, more than half were 25-35
Race	2/3 Caucasian, 1/3 African American
Education	Mixed, college predominate, some college and high school graduates
Income	Mixed in ranges of #25K, \$25-50K and \$50-75K
Employment	Mix of working and non-working mothers

Key Findings

Women candidly described the complexity of physical and emotional consequences due to vaginal laxity

Reduced Sensation	Difficulty Reaching Orgasm	Feeling old, worn out
Loss of Sexuality	Burdensome Sexual Performance	Yearning for Intimacy and Confidence

Key Findings

The majority of participants do not talk to their OB/GYN about their perceived vaginal looseness or loss of sensation for various reasons

- They are embarrassed to bring it up
- They perceive the physicians as too old or too young; or if they don’t have children or not a woman, they wouldn’t understand
- They don’t know how to articulate their experience; or they dismiss or diminish it’s impact
- There is no validation of the problem, so they are concerned of being dismissed or misunderstood by their OB/GYN

Women do NOT believe that Kegels exercises work as a treatment for vaginal laxity

- Women who initiated a dialogue with a healthcare professional were advised to do Kegel exercises, which they stated did not work

“I feel like that’s the only antidote that’s talked about
“Do your Kegels. Do your Kegels”

Women are interested in a medical procedure for vaginal laxity

- 50% had interest in a non-surgical vaginal tightening procedure to address their lost physical sensation and sexual satisfaction during intercourse
- They expressed interest in information, validation and reassurance that vaginal laxity can be treated

Conclusions

- This qualitative survey confirms that vaginal laxity is a significant concern which is rarely acknowledged
- Women perceive that improving vaginal tightness would enhance sexual satisfaction for themselves and their partners