

Pelvic pain a major issue for women nearing mid-life, research reveals

May 22 2018, by Liane Topham-Kindley

Many women nearing mid-life suffer some form of pelvic pain like period pain, or pain with sex however, pregnancy and childbirth appears to offer some protection, latest findings from the University of Otago's Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study reveal.

Half of the 429 women aged 38 at the time of participating in the survey, reported having some form of pelvic pain in the previous 12 months, lead author of the study, Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Antoinette Righarts says.

"The findings confirm a high prevalence of pelvic pain in women and, in particular, period pain was still very common among 38-year-olds at 46 per cent," Dr. Righarts explains.

However, the study also found pregnancy and childbirth appeared to protect women from pain with sex and other pelvic pain, although there was no long-term benefit for preventing period pain.

Senior author and clinical lead on the study, Professor Wayne Gillett, says the researchers were not able to identify any long-term negative consequences (following pregnancy and childbirth) from pelvic pain, and especially period pain.

The study findings provide reassurance to women who have had, or are considering having children, Professor Gillett says.

The researchers found that a diagnosis of endometriosis (a condition where the layer of tissue that normally covers the inside of the uterus grows on the outside) was associated with pain with periods (dysmenorrhoea) and pain with sex, but was not associated with the pain that young women can get when they have their first period (primary dysmenorrhoea).

Furthermore, primary dysmenorrhoea did not adversely affect a woman's subsequent fertility, Professor Gillett says.

"Current clinical practices for [young women](#) with dysmenorrhoea are to encourage an early diagnosis of endometriosis however, it seems there is no evidence that this is beneficial."

Dr. Righarts says the research is significant because as the study was carried out as a part of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study – a longitudinal study following the lives of 1037 babies born between 1 April 1972 and 31 March 1973 at Queen Mary Maternity Hospital in Dunedin – it is relatively free from the selection and participating biases that can affect health surveys.

This is because [women](#) did not participate in the study because they had a particular interest in pelvic [pain](#); the study of sexual and reproductive health was just one of many areas investigated as part of the wider Dunedin Study.

Dr. Righarts says the study confirms that [pelvic pain](#) is common however, it is a complex condition which requires further study in order to elucidate the causes.

This research was published today in the *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*.

Provided by University of Otago

Citation: Pelvic pain a major issue for women nearing mid-life, research reveals (2018, May 22)
retrieved 2 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-05-pelvic-pain-major-issue-women.html>

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