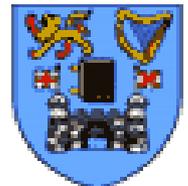


# CHANGES IN THE SEXUAL HEALTH OF PRIMIPAROUS WOMEN FROM PRE-PREGNANCY TO EARLY PREGNANCY

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Prof Agnes Higgins  
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The MAMMI Study

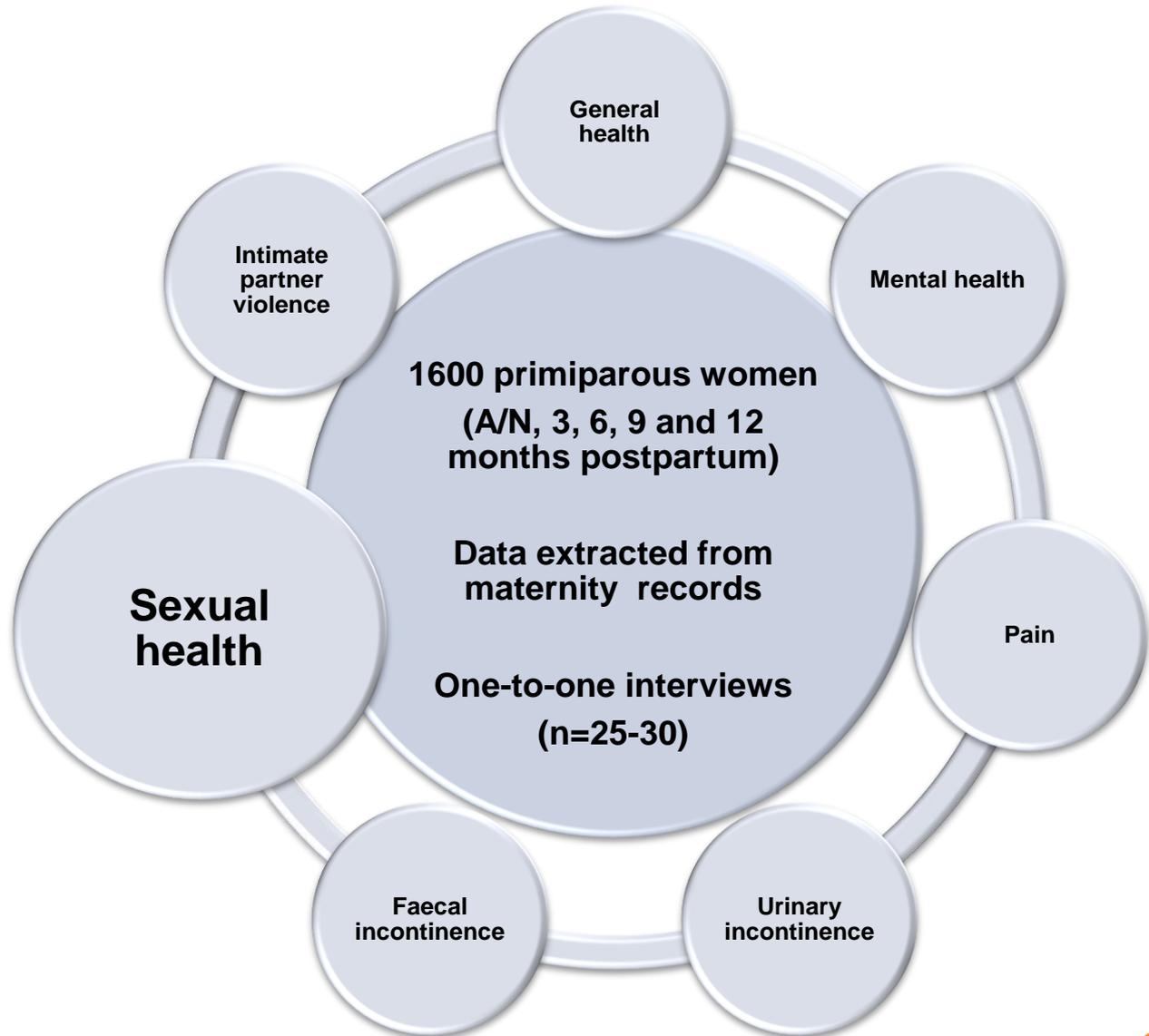


Trinity College Dublin

# Outline

- Context of this presentation
- Descriptive statistics on changes to sexual health
- Pre-pregnancy Vs Early Pregnancy
  
- Are these changes in sexual health dysfunctions?
  
- Is changed sexual desire in pregnancy a dysfunction or an adaptation?
  
- What women say regarding changed sexual desire

# Context of my study

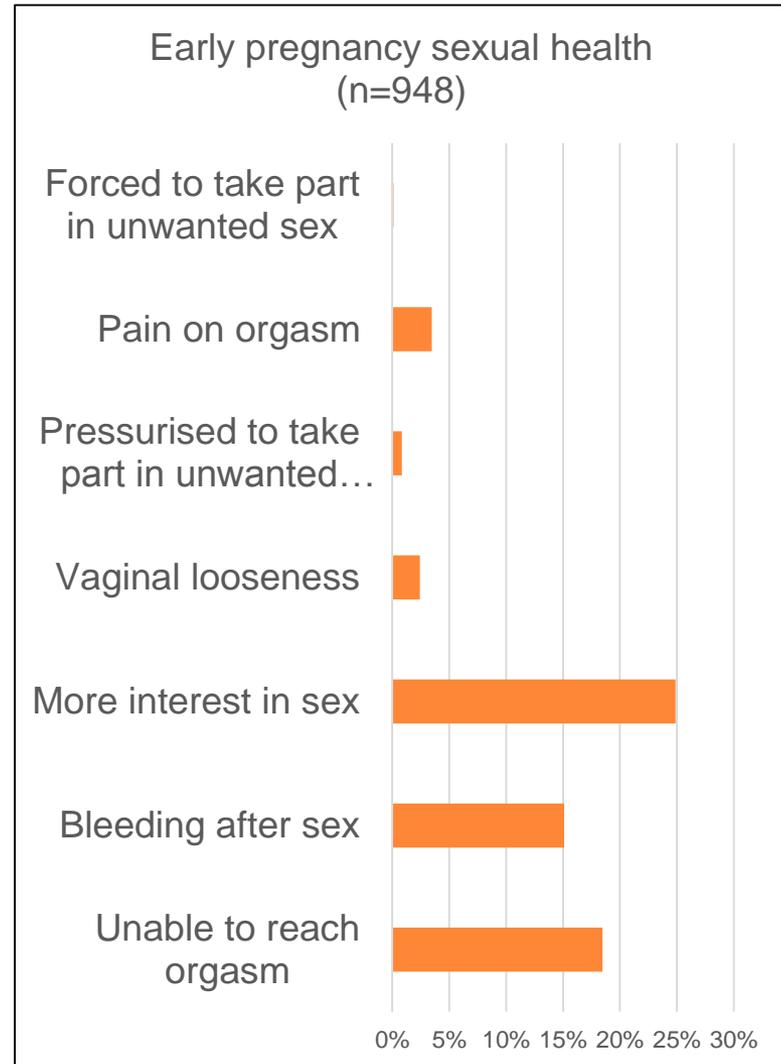
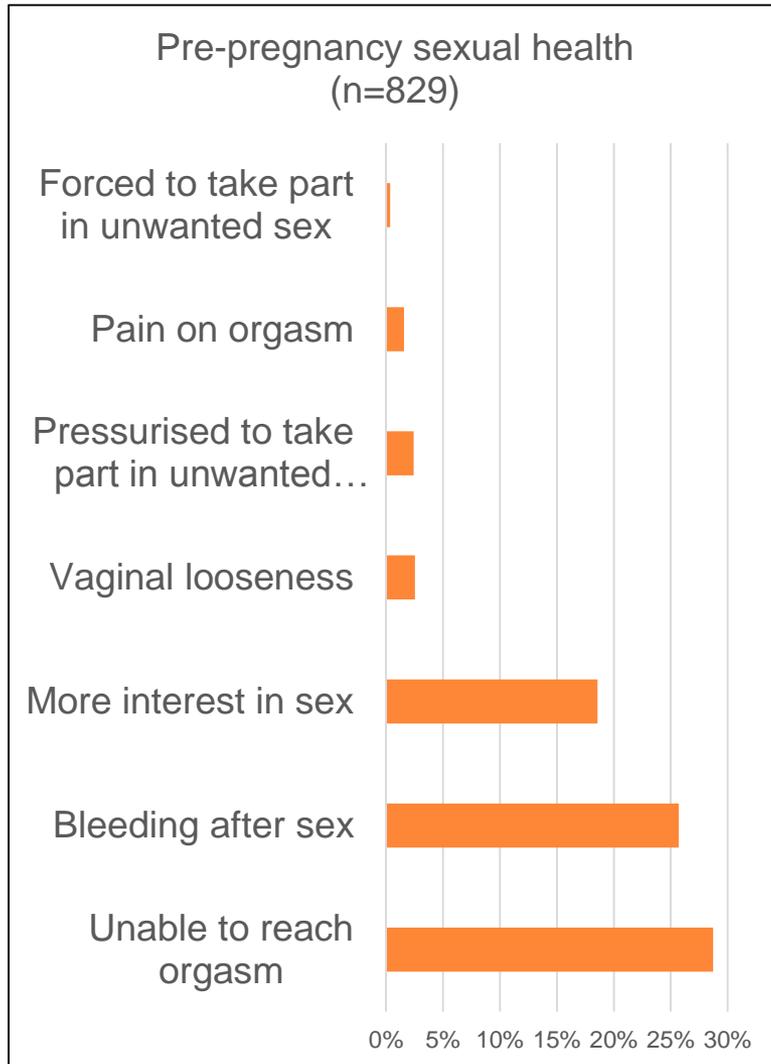


1214 antenatal responses

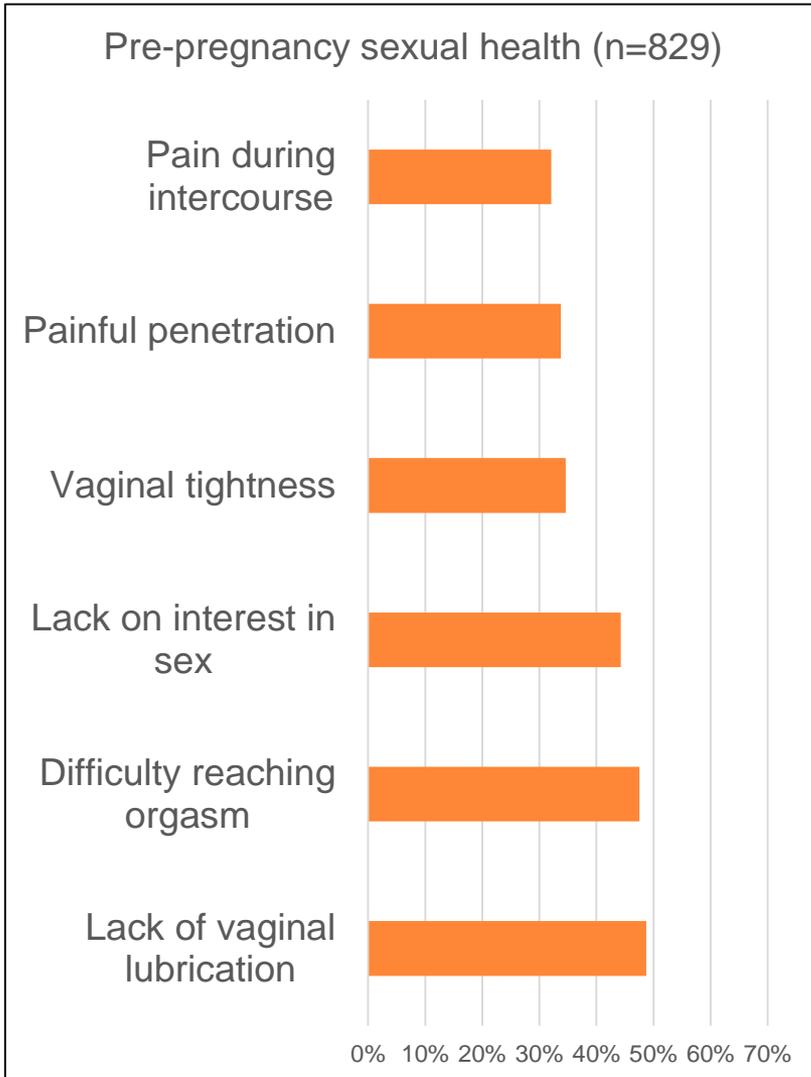
Maternal health **And** Maternal Morbidity in Ireland (MAMMI)

## Pre-pregnancy sexual health (68%)

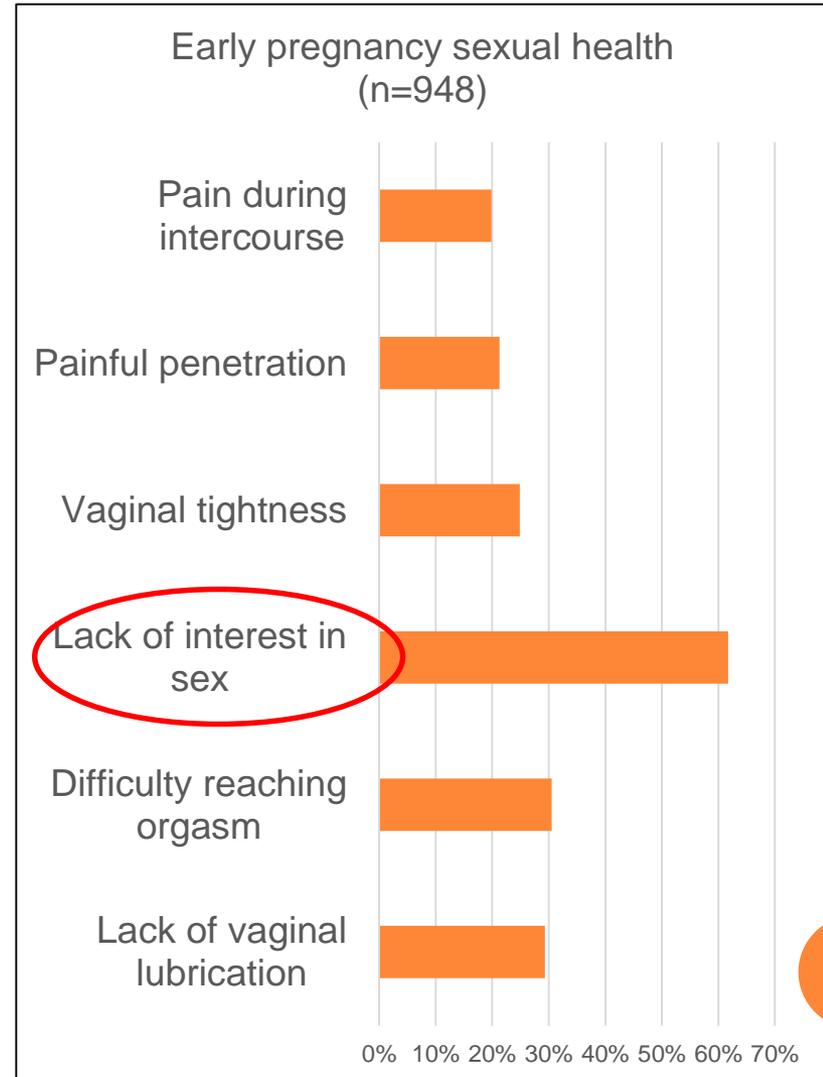
## Early pregnancy sexual health changes (79%)



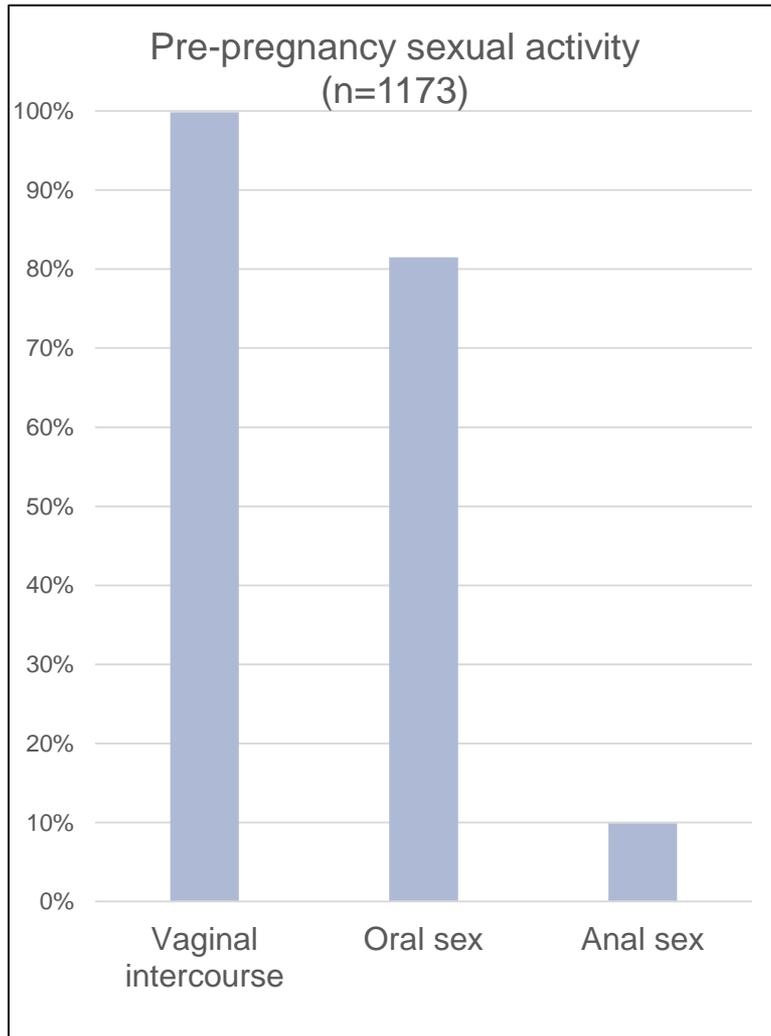
## Pre-pregnancy sexual health (68%)



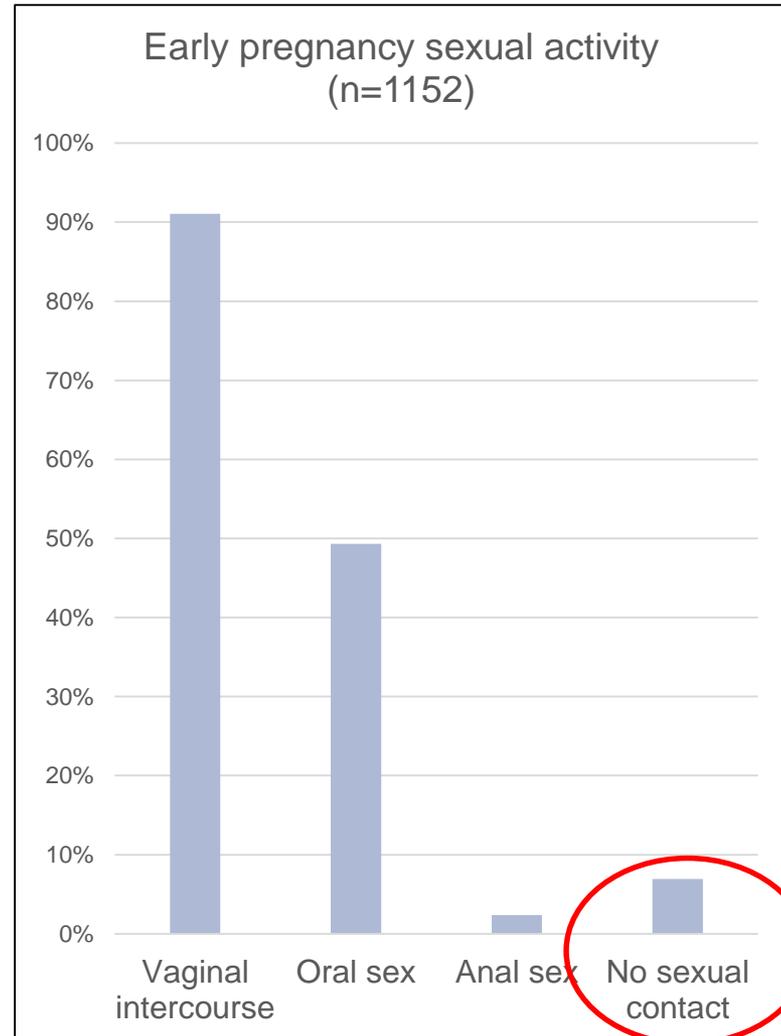
## Early pregnancy sexual health changes (79%)



## Pre-pregnancy sexual activity



## Early pregnancy sexual activity



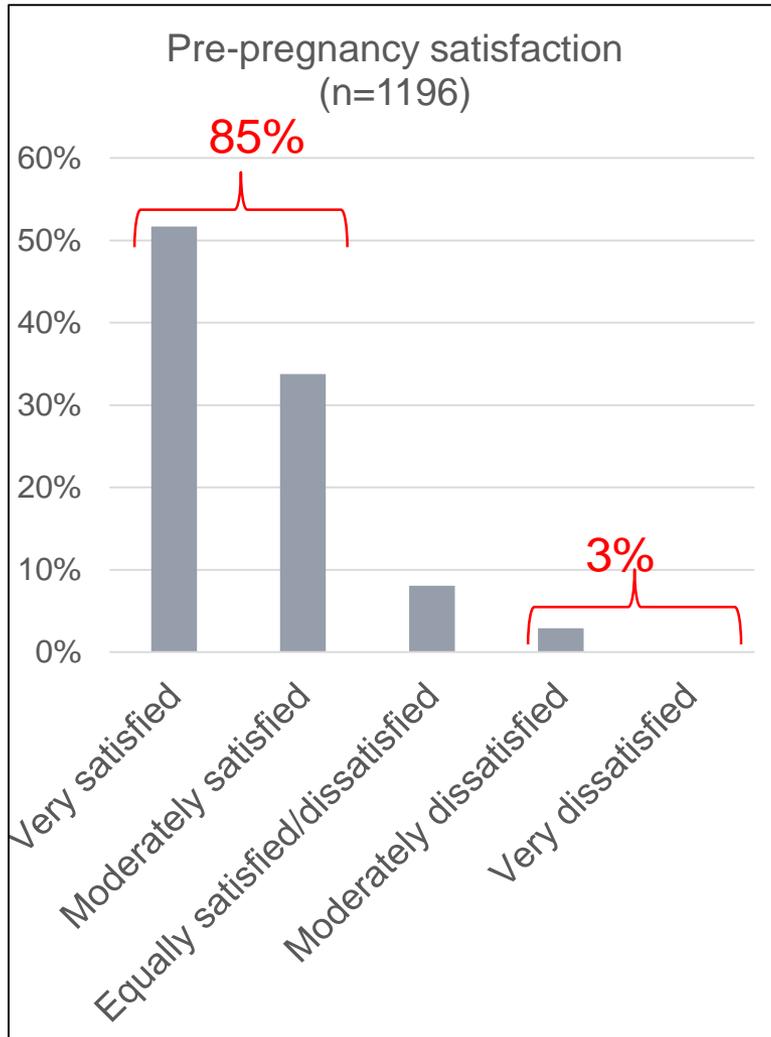
## Pre-pregnancy frequency of sexual activity (n=1195)

1-2 times per month	14%
1-2 times per week	54%
3-4 times per week	24%
> 4 times per week	3%

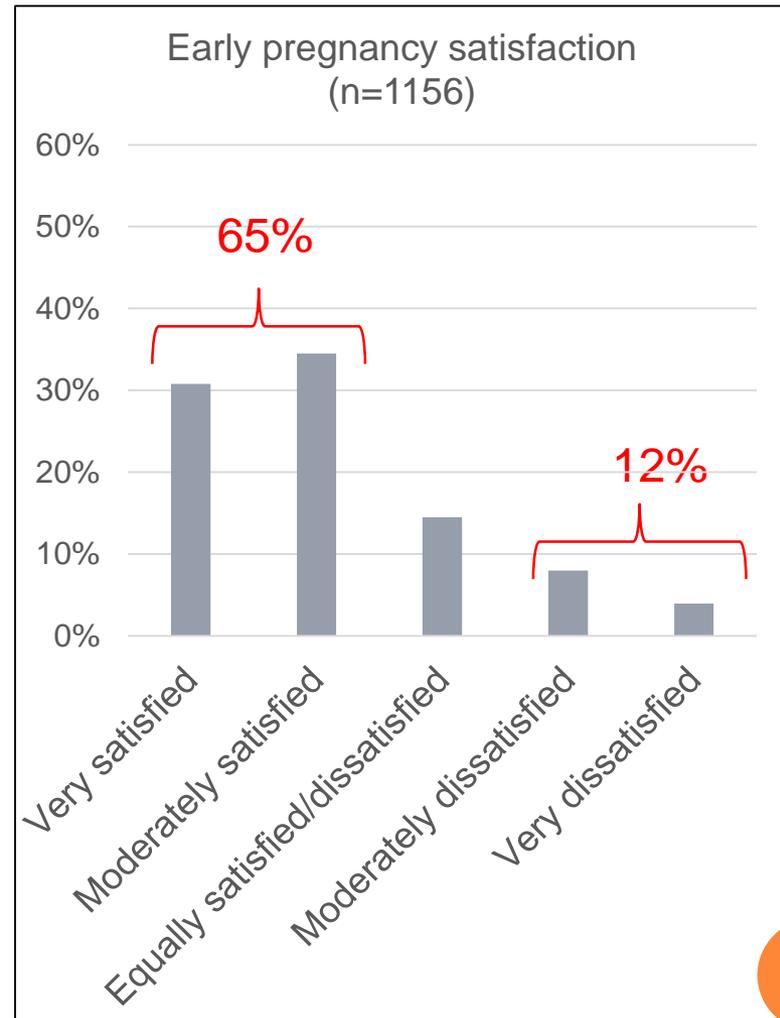
## Early pregnancy frequency of sexual activity (n=1105)

1-2 times per month	43%
1-2 times per week	43%
3-4 times per week	8%
>4 times per week	1%

## Pre-pregnancy satisfaction with sexual life



## Early pregnancy satisfaction with sexual life



# Are these sexual health changes problems or dysfunctions?

C14 SINCE THE START of your pregnancy, have you experienced any of the following?

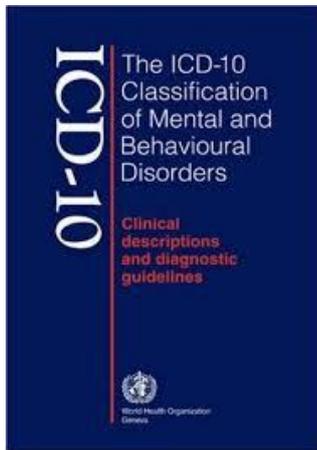
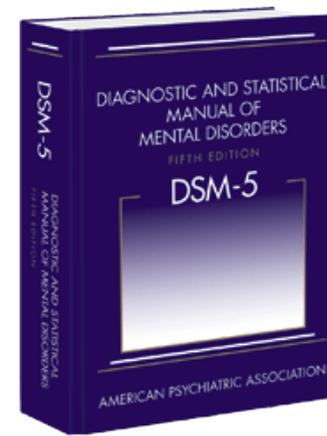
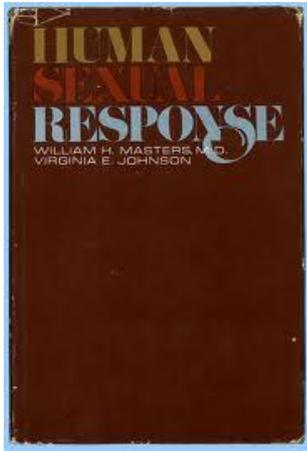
(Please tick one response on each line.)

	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer
a. Lack of vaginal lubrication	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
b. Painful penetration	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
c. Pain during sexual intercourse	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
d. Pain on orgasm	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
e. Difficulty reaching orgasm	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
f. Unable to reach orgasm	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
g. Vaginal tightness	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
h. Vaginal looseness / lack of muscle tone	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
i. Bleeding or vaginal irritation after sex	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
j. Loss of interest in sex compared with before your pregnancy	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
k. More interest in sex compared with before your pregnancy	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
l. Being pressured to take part in unwanted sexual activity	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
m. Being forced to take part in unwanted sexual activity	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
n. Other (please describe)	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

Reduced frequency of sexual activity

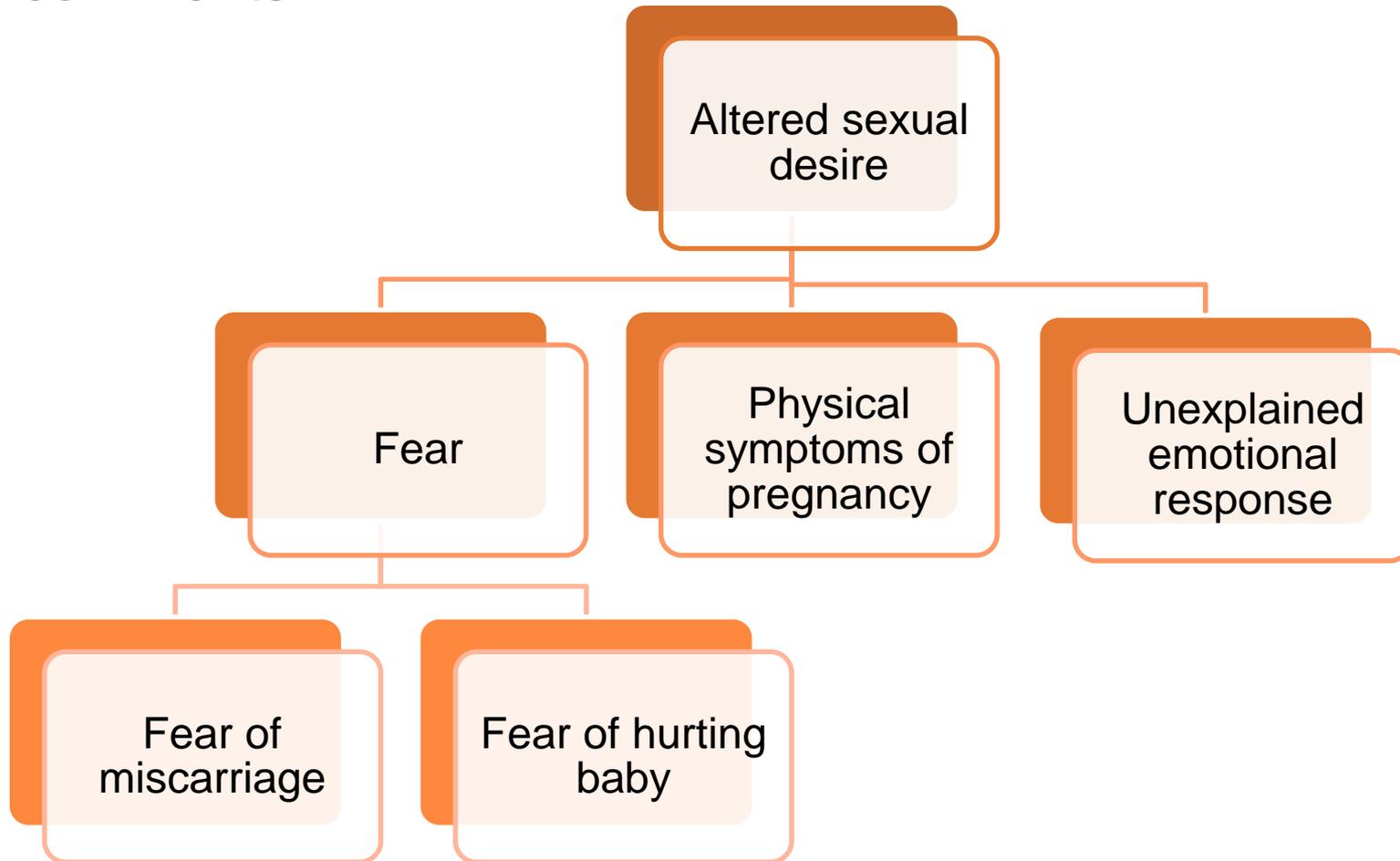
Changed sexual activities

No sexual activity



# What do women say about their altered sexual desire?

353 (29%) women added additional qualitative comments



# Fear (1)

## Fear of miscarriage

*'anxious having sex and reaching orgasm because I've had 2 miscarriages previously and I had spotting between 6 and 9 weeks'*

*'I haven't had sex due to my previous miscarriage. I was advised by my doctor not to have sex until around 20 weeks for safety reasons'*

*'stressed at the idea of losing the baby'*

## Fear (2)

### Fear of hurting the baby

*'both myself and my husband have had less interest in sex mainly because of fear of hurting the baby'*

*'fear of sexual intercourse causing damage to the baby'*

*I had only sex when I was on 3 months because my husband was scared for sex as he might hurt the baby, this is our first baby'*

*'my partner is afraid to harm the baby or that anything else could happen'*

# Physical symptoms of pregnancy

*'due to exhaustion probably less than 1-2 a month'*

*'I feel a good bit tired-er in the evenings and look forward to a good nights sleep'*

*'due to sickness probably only twice in 4 months'*

*'tired, nausea and nervous'*

*'bump makes it sometimes not so comfortable'*

## Unexplained emotional response

*'I have enjoyed sex when I've had it, but don't feel like it very often'*

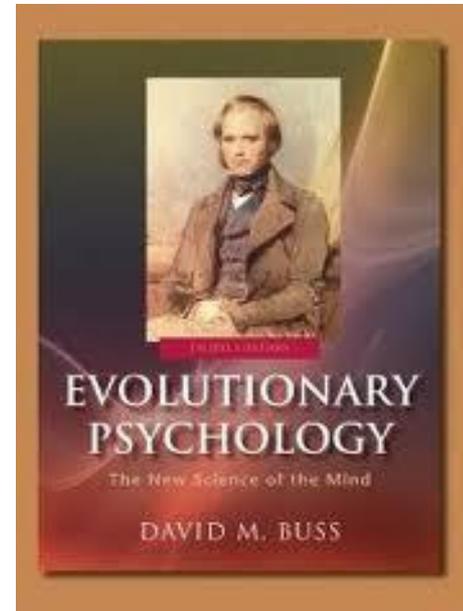
*'very little sexual activity but neither my partner nor I have an issue with this'*

*'I think it's a mental block but I find it strange to orgasm when there is a baby growing in me'*

*'while we are well aware that intercourse would not affect the baby – after 5 years of trying, a failed IVI, then a successful IVF we were or perhaps more I was being over cautious. We have not lost intimacy though'*

Is altered sexual desire a dysfunction or adaptation?





# Summary

- ✓ Women experience changes to their sexual health from pre-pregnancy to early pregnancy
- ✓ Many of these changes are labelled as 'sexual health problems'
- ✓ Types of sexual activities change, frequency of sexual activity reduces
- ✓ Women do not report distress with changes to their desire
- ✓ Midwives need to remain open to the possibility that changes are not problems and guard against pathologising change in these women

# Acknowledgements

Women participating in the study

My supervision team – Prof Agnes Higgins, Dr Valerie Smith, Prof Cecily Begley & Deirdre Daly

My colleagues on the MAMMI study team

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