

OBSTETRIC ANAL SPHINCTER INJURY IN THE UK AND ITS EFFECT ON BOWEL, BLADDER AND SEXUAL FUNCTION IN 2008

Hypothesis / aims of study

Obstetric anal sphincter injury occurs in 0.5-9% of vaginal deliveries (1). The reported incidence of subsequent symptoms, such as faecal urgency and flatal/ faecal incontinence, varies widely from 25-57 %. Consequently it is difficult to accurately counsel women and provide relevant prognostic data following such an injury (2,3). Yet obstetric anal sphincter injury is responsible for significant physical and psychological sequelae for women and therefore detailed, up to date, information is indeed required. The aim of this study is to prospectively determine the incidence of bowel, urinary and sexual function following obstetric anal sphincter injury in a large UK Teaching Hospital Trust between 2004-2008.

Study design, materials and methods

255 women who sustained an obstetric anal sphincter injury were assessed three months post partum and details of their bowel and urinary symptoms were documented.

Results

The majority of women were primiparous and had undergone a spontaneous vaginal delivery (Table 1). The mean birth weight was 3556g (1240-4800g).

Table 1: Demographic Details

Mean age of women	29.7yrs (17-42)
Parity	
Primip	82%
1 previous delivery	15%
≥2 previous deliveries	3%
Mode of Delivery	
Spontaneous vaginal delivery	57.2%
Forceps	30.6%
Ventouse	12.2%
Classification of Anal Sphincter Injury	
-3a	38%
-3b	42%
-3c	14 %
-4	6%
Type of Repair	
End to End	24.7%
Overlap	75.3%

Bowel Function

Three months after sustaining an obstetric anal sphincter injury 93% of women opened their bowels daily. 27.4% of women reported passing blood with stool and 20% experienced pain on bowel opening.

33.5% of women described frequent or occasional faecal urgency and 22% had variable or poor control of flatus. 2% (n=4) of women reported episodes of faecal incontinence since delivery.

Urinary and Sexual Function

14% of women reported stress urinary incontinence, 14% experienced urgency and 20% voided 1-2hourly during the day. 62% of women had resumed intercourse with 27.5% of those women reporting dyspareunia.

Interpretation of results

The vast majority of women who sustain an obstetric anal sphincter injury in the UK are primiparous. One third of women experience faecal symptoms in the short to medium term following an obstetric anal sphincter injury. These symptoms are usually faecal urgency or variable control of flatus. There was no significant difference in the rate of anal symptoms between the 'overlap' and 'end to end' repair cohorts

Concluding message

The majority of women who sustain an obstetric anal sphincter injury in the UK in 2008 make a good recovery with only 2% reporting any episodes of faecal incontinence. This large prospective UK study provides clinicians and women with accurate and up to date information relating to bowel, urinary and sexual function following obstetric anal sphincter injury.

References

1. RCOG Guidelines. (2006) No 29.
2. Aust N Z J Obstet Gynaecol. (1998) Nov; 38(4):414-7.
3. Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand. (1998) Aug;77(7):736-40.

Specify source of funding or grant	No external funding
Is this a clinical trial?	No
What were the subjects in the study?	HUMAN
Was this study approved by an ethics committee?	No
This study did not require ethics committee approval because	This was an anonymous evaluation of a current service provided by the hospital trust and therefore did not require ethical committee approval
Was the Declaration of Helsinki followed?	Yes
Was informed consent obtained from the patients?	No