

Pelvic floor dysfunction
A clinical and epidemiological study

Eva Uustal Fornell

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Abstract:

In a prospective study established in 1990, anal sphincter rupture at delivery was found in 2.4% of women and 47% of these women had problems with fecal incontinence. Although less severe, fecal incontinence was also found among 45% in a comparison group without anal sphincter rupture. In a follow-up study after ten years, no improvement was noted in either group. Women with anal sphincter rupture were more subjectively incontinent and had lower anal pressures than the comparison group. Women with subsequent vaginal deliveries had lower anal pressures and more incontinence than those delivered by caesarean section or no subsequent delivery.

In an epidemiological study of 1368 women, urinary incontinence was found in 9% of 40-year-olds and 19% of 60-year-olds. Flatus incontinence was found in 9% and 19%, incontinence for liquid stool in 5% and 8% and for solid stool 0.3% and 1.7% in 40-year-olds and 60-year-olds, respectively. Genital prolapse symptoms were found in 4% (genital bulge), 15% (pelvic heaviness) and use of finger in vagina or perineum by defecation (12%) in all women.

Factors associated with urinary and fecal incontinence were anal sphincter rupture, chronic bronchitis, overweight, multiparity, age, hiatus and groin hernias and hysterectomy. Prolapse symptoms were associated with vaginal delivery and large tears at delivery but not with overweight. All types of incontinence and genital prolapse were strongly associated with each other.

For epidemiological studies, the definition of urinary incontinence as leakage weekly or more often is suggested. The concept of flatus incontinence needs careful operationalization to be of value in differentiating symptoms of anal sphincter dysfunction from disorders of bowel motility and normal passing of wind. A model for operationalization is proposed. Possible measures for the prevention of PFD could be prevention of chronic bronchitis, overweight and large injuries at delivery, especially after large tears and anal sphincter rupture.

From the Department of Molecular and Clinical Medicine

Division of Obstetrics and Gynecology

Faculty of Health Sciences

Linköping University Hospital

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