Abstract:

BACKGROUND: Childhood sexual abuse can have several negative consequences on pregnancy, birth, and the early neonatal period. However, most obstetricians are not aware if their patients have a history of childhood sexual abuse. We therefore investigated childhood sexual abuse experiences in 226 women three to eight months after delivery of a healthy child. METHODS: 415 women were approached to answer a self-administered questionnaire including obstetrical questions and questions focusing on abuse experiences. 320 women agreed to participate, 226 (69.1% of the women fulfilling inclusion criteria) of which returned a completed questionnaire. Sexual abuse was explored using a modified version of a questionnaire developed by Wyatt. The complete questionnaire was designed in cooperation with the German "Frauennotruf", a society providing care for victims of sexual abuse. RESULTS: The prevalence of childhood sexual abuse was a minimum of 11.5% and a maximum of 14.6% if women who were not sure about such experiences during their childhood were included. Another 1.3% of the women had experienced sexual abuse as an adult. Lifetime sexual abuse prevalence was 12.8% and 15.9%, respectively. Of the women with an experience of childhood sexual abuse, 42.3% mentioned an ongoing abuse situation for at least six months. CONCLUSIONS: As approximately
every 9th woman presenting for obstetrical care has experienced childhood sexual abuse, and as those experiences may have a negative impact on fetal and maternal well-being, adequate counseling models should be offered to victims of sexual abuse.