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REVISTA DE ENFERMAGEM | JOURNAL OF NURSING

RESEARCH ARTICLE (ORIGINAL) 🔓

Pregnant women's satisfaction with the care provided by nurse midwives during the COVID-19 pandemic

A satisfação da grávida com os cuidados das enfermeiras obstétricas durante a pandemia COVID-19

Satisfacción de las embarazadas con la atención de las enfermeras obstétricas durante la pandemia de COVID-19

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Abstract

Background: Prenatal nursing appointments underwent changes during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely in the restriction of companions. For this reason, it is important to assess pregnant women's satisfaction with nursing care during this period.

Objective: To assess pregnant women's satisfaction with nurse midwife-led prenatal appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology: A qualitative descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted with a sample of 196 pregnant women. The Portuguese version of the General Practice Nurse Satisfaction Scale (*Escala de Satisfação dos Pacientes com a Assistência de Enfermagem*) was administered to the sample. The tool consists of the following dimensions: interpersonal relationship and communication, confidence, credibility, and dedication.

Results: Pregnant women are, on average, more satisfied in the interpersonal relationship and communication dimension and less satisfied in the dedication dimension.

Conclusion: Pregnant women are satisfied with nursing care and acknowledge its importance. This finding reinforces the importance of nurse midwife-led consultations.

Keywords: patient satisfaction; nursing care; pregnant woman; nurse midwives; COVID-19

Resumo

Enquadramento: Em tempo de pandemia, as consultas de enfermagem de vigilância da gravidez sofreram alterações, nomeadamente na restrição de acompanhantes. Por esse motivo, é importante a avaliação da satisfação das grávidas com a assistência de enfermagem durante este contexto pandémico.

Objetivo: Avaliar a satisfação da grávida com a assistência das enfermeiras obstétricas nas consultas de vigilância da gravidez durante o contexto de pandemia COVID-19.

Metodologia: Estudo transversal descritivo de natureza quantitativa, com uma amostra de 196 grávidas. Aplicado a Escala de Satisfação dos Pacientes com a Assistência de Enfermagem (General Practice Nurse Satisfaction Scale - GPNS), constituída pelas dimensões: relacionamento interpessoal e comunicação, confiança, credibilidade e dedicação.

Resultados: As grávidas apresentam-se em média mais satisfeitas na dimensão relacionamento interpessoal e comunicação e menos satisfeitas na dimensão dedicação.

Conclusão: As grávidas apresentam-se satisfeitas com a assistência de enfermagem percecionando a sua importância. Tal reforça a pertinência das consultas serem realizadas por um Enfermeiro Especialista em Enfermagem de Saúde Materna e Obstétrica.

Palavras-chave: satisfação do paciente; cuidados de enfermagem; gestantes; enfermeiras obstétricas; COVID-19

Resumen

Marco contextual: En tiempos de pandemia, las citas de enfermería para el seguimiento del embarazo cambiaron, sobre todo la restricción de acompañantes. Por esta razón, es importante evaluar la satisfacción de las mujeres embarazadas con los cuidados de enfermería durante este contexto pandémico.

Objetivo: Evaluar la satisfacción de las mujeres embarazadas con la atención prestada por las enfermeras obstétricas en las consultas de seguimiento del embarazo durante la pandemia de COVID-19.

Metodología: Estudio descriptivo transversal de carácter cuantitativo, con una muestra de 196 mujeres embarazadas. Se aplicó la Escala de Satisfacción de los Pacientes con Asistencia de Enfermería (General Practice Nurse Satisfaction Scale - GPNS), compuesta por las siguientes dimensiones: relaciones interpersonales y comunicación, confianza, credibilidad y dedicación.

Resultados: Las mujeres embarazadas están, de media, más satisfechas en la dimensión relaciones interpersonales y comunicación, y menos satisfechas en la dimensión dedicación.

Conclusión: Las embarazadas se mostraron satisfechas con los cuidados de enfermería y se dieron cuenta de su importancia. Esto refuerza la pertinencia de que las consultas sean realizadas por una enfermera especializada en Enfermería de Salud Materna y Obstétrica.

Palabras clave: satisfacción del paciente; cuidados de enfermería; mujeres embarazadas; enfermeras obstétricas; COVID-19

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Introduction

Prenatal nurse-midwifery care demands quality. Nursing care should be provided based on scientific knowledge, with technology appropriate to the existing material conditions, to achieve the desired quality and meet patients' complex needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges for nursing practice and healthcare organizations, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and visitor restrictions. However, it has also presented several opportunities, such as video consultations and teleconsultations (Direção-Geral da Saúde [DGS], 2020). Some of these changes are still in place, enhancing care delivery. During the pandemic, companions were not allowed to be present during prenatal care appointments. Therefore, it is therefore important to assess if the measures implemented during this period affected nursing care.

The level of patient satisfaction is an important indicator for assessing the quality of nursing care. Thus, it is crucial to increase patient satisfaction to ensure the quality of nursing care. Patients play an active and critical role in the process of continuous improvement in nursing care (Venturi et al., 2009).

The term *nurse midwives* will be used throughout the article because, on the one hand, it is a descriptor in health sciences, and, on the other hand, this area of specialty is predominantly comprised of female professionals.

This study aimed to assess pregnant women's satisfaction with the care provided by nurse midwives in prenatal appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

Motherhood is a normal process of life characterized not only by physiological and biological changes in the mother's body, including physical brain changes, but also by a psychological adaptation to the new reality of pregnancy, childbirth and the future baby. The prevalence of anxiety and depression in pregnant women has significantly increased after the spread of COVID-19 across the world. Pregnancy-related anxiety is relatively common, with a current COVID-related prevalence of 26%-57% among women. It appears to be a unique syndrome that reflects fears about the health and well-being of self and baby, the hospital, impending childbirth, parenting, or the maternal role (Jimenez-Barragan et al, 2023).

Since prenatal nurse midwifery is defined as the continuum of care designed and provided by nurse midwives to ensure a positive experience of pregnancy, it should be integrated into appointments and/or group interventions (Ordem dos Enfermeiros [OE], 2021).

Nurse midwives have high levels of critical judgment and decision-making, taking responsibility for a differential diagnosis. Thus, it is appropriate to conduct research in settings where nurse midwives are heavily involved, such as prenatal appointments, to gather information on patient satisfaction with the specialized care received (OE, 2021). This reflects the importance of midwife-led pregnancy surveillance to achieve health gains, including the early detection of complications and the timely referral to the appropriate professionals for pregnancy, labor, or postpartum complications, fetal and neonatal complications, gynecological complications, social problems, and referrals (domestic violence, self-neglect/child neglect, among others; OE, 2021).

The continuous search for better outcomes and quality in health care provision is crucial for developing a more efficient organizational policy that meets patients' needs. Patient satisfaction has become a key driver in promoting quality in healthcare organizations, allowing for the assessment, analysis, and identification of the most relevant dimensions for patients and their level of satisfaction. Specialized nursing care is recognized to increase satisfaction and improve health outcomes. It is essential to continuously analyze nursing outcomes to obtain information on how care benefits patients, families, and communities. The Portuguese Nursing regulator (OE) identifies these health gains through indicators that measure performance and characterize the health status of populations. These indicators monitor, assess, and promote the quality of the care provided by nurse midwives (OE, 2021). It is therefore essential to understand the level of satisfaction with nursing care.

Research question

What is the level of satisfaction among pregnant women regarding the care provided by nurse midwives in prenatal appointments during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Methodology

This is a descriptive cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach.

The nonprobability convenience sample consisted of pregnant women being monitored at the obstetrics outpatient clinic of the CUF Descobertas Hospital during cardiotocographies (CTGs).

The study included pregnant women who were being monitored at the obstetrics outpatient clinic of the CUF Descobertas Hospital, were over 18 years of age, proficient in Portuguese, willing to participate, and had access to the Internet to complete the questionnaire. Pregnant women of foreign nationality, under the age of 18, without Portuguese proficiency, and reference to mental/psychiatric disorder.

The sample consisted of 196 pregnant women who met the eligibility criteria between February and June 2021. The ethical principles inherent to this type of research were ensured. Authorization was obtained from the authors of the scale and the institution's Board of Directors and Ethics Committee. A favorable opinion was obtained (Project/Study 87).

Data were collected through a questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section assessed sociodemographic variables (age, marital status, religion, nationality, educa-

tion level) and obstetric variables (number of deliveries, planned pregnancy, desired pregnancy, place of prenatal appointment, childbirth preparation classes, companion during prenatal appointments). The second section consisted of the General Practice Nurse Satisfaction Scale (GPNS), developed by Halcomb et al. (2011) and validated for the Portuguese language by Pereira et al. (2020). This version consists of four dimensions: interpersonal relationship and communication, confidence, credibility, and dedication. It consists of 21 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *totally disagree* to *totally agree*. The items are scored from 1 to 5, with highest scores indicating greater levels of satisfaction.

The pregnant women completed the questionnaire online after accessing a link sent by email and/or a QR code provided in their pregnancy health record. Data were collected using Google Forms.

Data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 24.0 and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. This study used absolute and relative frequencies, measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode), measures of dispersion or variability (standard deviation, minimum value, and maximum value), a parametric test (Student's t-test), Pearson's correlation coefficient (Pearson's r), and Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Results

This study analyzed a sample (Table 1) of 197 pregnant women (Table 1). The majority of participants were in the 31-35 age group (39.5%) and university graduates (47.2%). The majority of the pregnant women were married or in a civil partnership (88.3%), Portuguese (98%), and Catholic (80.7%). With regard to obstetric data, 45.2% of the pregnant women were primiparous. In most cases, the pregnancy was planned (81.7%), desired (98.5%), and monitored (100%) in a private hospital (70.1%). During pregnancy, the majority of the women did not attend any childbirth preparation classes (52.8%). The majority (97.5%) of pregnant women were not accompanied by their significant other during prenatal appointments due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1

Distribution of the absolute and relative values of the variables

	Sociodemographic and obstetric variables	*N*	*%*
Marital status	Married/Civil partnership	174	88.3
	Separated/Divorced	3	1.5
	Single	19	9.6
	Widowed	1	0.5
Age	21-25 years	2	1
	26-30 years	39	19.8
	31-35 years	78	39.6
	36-40 years	65	33
	41-45 years	12	6.1
	46-50 years	1	0.5
	Over 50 years		
Nationality	Other	4	2
	Portuguese	193	98
Religion	Agnostic/Atheist/no religion	29	14.7
	Catholic	159	80.7
	Other	7	3.6
	Protestant	1	0.5
	Jehovah's witness	1	0.5
Education level	9th grade	4	2
	12th grade	23	11.7
	Technological specialization course	6	3
	Bacharelato (3-year undergraduate degree)	2	1
	Bachelor's degree	93	47.2
	Master's degree	66	33.5
	Doctoral degree	3	1.5
Number of deliveries	0	89	45.2
	1	83	42.1
	2	23	11.7
	3	2	1
Planned pregnancy	Yes	161	81.7
	No	36	18.3
Desired pregnancy	Yes	194	98.5
	No	3	1.5
Place of prenatal appointments	Health Center and Private Hospital	59	29.9
	Private Hospital	138	70.1
Did you carry out any CPC?	Yes	93	47.2
	No	104	52.8
Did you have a companion during your prenatal appointments?	Yes	5	2.5
	No	192	97.5

Nota. N = Number of participants in the sample; *%* = Percentage; CPC = Childbirth preparation course.

According to Vilelas, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is used to assess internal consistency validity. Values range from 0 to 1, where alpha is a squared correlation coefficient that measures the homogeneity of the questions by correlating the mean scores of all items to estimate the consistency of the instrument (Vilelas, 2020).
Regarding the GNPS, the internal consistency of the 21-item scale was analyzed, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97 was obtained, which confirms its good reliability. Table 2 shows that the domains of the scale also have good reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.95.

In Brazil, Pereira et al. (2020) applied the Portuguese version of the GNPS (*Escala de Satisfação dos Pacientes com a Assistência de Enfermagem*) to 199 patients and found that the instrument had satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93, ranging from 0.87 to 0.66 for the Interpersonal relationship and communication and Dedication dimensions, respectively. In Australia, Halcomb et al. (2011) applied the GNPS to 739 patients and found satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97, ranging from 0.95 in the Confidence and credibility dimension to 0.90 in the Interpersonal and communication skills dimension. The

results for the total scale are similar to those obtained in the original version of the scale (Cronbach's alpha of 0.97; Halcom et al., 2011) and higher than those obtained in the Brazilian version, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93 for the total scale and 0.66-0.87 for the subdomains (Pereira et al., 2020).

Table 2

Reliability of the Escala de Satisfação dos Pacientes com a Assistência de Enfermagem

Items	Cronbach's alpha
Interpersonal relationship and communication	
Confidence	0.89
Credibility	0.86
Dedication	0.75
Satisfaction with nursing care	

The level of satisfaction with nursing care is high, with a mean total value of 89.93. The mean level of satisfaction was also high in each of the five items. However, the heterogeneity of the results was high for the total scale and for the Interpersonal relationship and communication and cofidence domains, as shown by the standard deviation higher than 1 (Table 3).

Table 3

Satisfaction with nursing care

Items	Min	Max	M	SD
Interpersonal relationship and communication	11	45	38.44	7.17
Confidence	8	30	25.69	4.11
Credibility	4	15	12.94	2.26
Dedication	5	15	12.86	2.02
Satisfaction with nursing care	28	105	89.93	14.97

Note. Min = Minimum; Max = Maximum; *M* = Mean; *SD* = Standard deviation.

Discussion

The satisfaction with nursing care is high, with a mean value for the total scale of 89.93. The mean value of satisfaction for each of the four items was also high. However, the heterogeneity of the results is high for the total scale and the Interpersonal relationship and communication and cofidence domains, as shown by the standard deviation higher than 1.

This result is aligned with those found in the study conducted to develop the scale (Halcom et al., 2011) and the Brazilian version by Pereira et al. (2020), which revealed high levels of patient satisfaction with nursing care.

In relation to the Interpersonal relationship and communication dimension, questions were asked about how helpful nurses were to facilitate the understanding of patients regarding their health, clear and complete explanations, patience, cordiality, teamwork, respect, attention, and encouragement (Chaves et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2018; Paiz et al., 2021). This dimension supports studies that indicate that communication is an essential aspect in care and a foundation for interpersonal relationships (Chaves et al., 2020; Sims et al., 2018; Paiz et al., 2021).

Pregnant women are on average more satisfied with the Interpersonal relationship and communication dimension. This dimension proved to be relevant because difficulties in communication and interpersonal relationships with nurses can hinder care (Chaves et al., 2020; Paiz et al., 2021; Sims et al., 2018).

The confidence dimension included questions related to whether patients trusted information the nurses provide, trusted the care provided, if they would follow nurses' recommendations, trusted nurses' ability to provide care, observed how updated nurses were, and whether they would recommend the nursing team to friends and family (Desborough et al., 2018; Jimenez-Barragan et al., 2023). Studies show that there is a distinction between confidence and credibility. Confidence must exist before credibility can occur. Therefore, these attributes need to be addressed separately (Desborough et al., 2018). Other studies confirm that patients trust nurses' ability to perform their duties and that they are up-to-date with scientific evidence (Castro et al., 2016; Chaves et al., 2020; Desborough et al., 2018).

In the credibility dimension, questions were asked about patients' positive opinion of nurses, whether they wanted

nurses to perform the procedures again, and whether the nurses provided careful care (Chaves et al., 2020; Kvael et al., 2018). This dimension proved to be consistent with the literature showing that credibility, although not a closed concept, is directly related to patient opinion and acceptance (Kvael et al., 2018). This is directly related to patient satisfaction with nursing care and occurs after the patient trusts in what the nurse says and does. As these are subjective attributes, credibility may take time to develop or even not develop at all (Chaves et al., 2020; Paiz et al., 2021; Kvael et al., 2018).

Although with a high mean score (12.86), the pregnant women in this sample were less satisfied with the dedication dimension, which should be improved to increase their levels of satisfaction.

In this dimension, questions were asked about useful recommendations provided by nurses to patients, nursing consultations, and time devoted to care. This dimension is in line with the literature, since time continuity, useful and quality information, and guidance are important for monitoring and valuing the patient and increase their satisfaction with nursing care (Kvael et al., 2018). One of the reasons why this dimension has lower mean scores than the other dimensions may be that appointments are not always carried out by the same nurse midwife.

The results show that pregnant women's satisfaction with the care provided by nurse midwives is high even during the pandemic, which means that, even in troubled times of change and challenges, the quality of the care provided by nurse midwives is high. Nurse midwives must provide care and guidance to pregnant women during prenatal appointments (Santos, 2018). Prenatal appointments aim to improve the quality of prenatal care through preventive actions and health education. They are an excellent way for nurse midwives to empathize with the couple and provide information about pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period (Santos, 2018). Thus, nurse midwives aim to provide pregnant women/couples with the necessary skills to facilitate the transition to parenthood, increase their satisfaction with the care provided by nurse midwives, and enhance pregnant women's autonomy and confidence in the parental role. Nurse midwives work with pregnant women and couples to develop measures for self-care by acquiring knowledge and skills (ICM, 2019). The DGS has expressed concerns about the quality of the National Health System. To address these concerns, the Department of Quality in Health has implemented systems to periodically monitor patients' satisfaction levels. For this reason, it is essential to involve patients in decisions regarding their own health and the functioning of the health system (DGS, 2015).

The limitations of this study include a small sample size and the use of nonprobability sampling method due to time and resource constraints and the study design. These aspects may limit the generalizability of the data. This topic remains relatively unexplored, and it is challenging to find comparable studies for a broader analysis of the findings.

Conclusion

Pregnant women's satisfaction with the care provided by nurse midwives during the COVID-19 pandemic is high. The mean scores in each of the five items of the GPNS are also high. This study presents new and relevant findings for prenatal monitoring aimed at implementing best practices in the care of pregnant women and promoting a positive pregnancy, labor, and childbirth experience, as proposed by the World Health Organization.

Identifying patient satisfaction is useful for nursing practice, particularly for promoting professional development to enhance patient care.

The GPNS is a valid and reliable tool for assessing patient satisfaction with nursing care. It promotes reflection by nurse midwives, bringing health gains for all families and health professionals.

This study contributes to the reflection on pregnant women's satisfaction with the care provided by nurse midwives during prenatal appointments. A comparative study should be conducted to assess pregnant women's satisfaction with the care provided by nurse midwives before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Author contributions

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