

QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION IN PREMENOPAUSAL WOMEN WITH TYPE 1 DIABETES.

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Background:

Sexual activity and relationships are important dimensions of quality of life.

Chronic conditions such as diabetes have been linked to impaired sexual function in both males and females, and studies have suggested that the prevalence of sexual dysfunction (SD) is higher in women with type 1 diabetes compared to women with type 2 diabetes and women without diabetes. There are multiple psychosocial factors that can impact on sexual function in women with type 1 diabetes, these include: depression; diabetes distress; and altered body image. These factors can be compounded, inhibiting women's engagement in and enjoyment of sexual interactions.

Aim:

To explore the sexual experiences and interactions of women with type 1 diabetes to explicate an understanding of the impact of diabetes on women's sexual function. The study was conducted as part of a wider project to develop a patient reported outcome measure to assess SD in premenopausal women with type 1 diabetes.

Method:

A qualitative study using face to face and virtual semi-structured interviews was conducted with premenopausal women with type 1 diabetes who have had some difficulties related to sexual functioning. Participants were recruited from two National Health Services (NHS) sites in the UK and from social media platforms. The data were analysed to generate themes using Framework analysis approach.

Result:

Eighteen women, aged 22-49, were interviewed (NHS sites n=13; online n=5). Five themes related to women experiences of SD were identified, these were; initiation of sexual activity, sexual confidence, sexual enjoyment, sexual engagement and sexual desire.

Conclusion:

SD in women with type 1 diabetes is a complex phenomenon impacting their experiences and quality of life. SD is related to multiple interacting biopsychosocial factors related to diabetes, including blood glucose levels, diabetes treatments and technologies and complications. A targeted measure of SD for women with type 1 diabetes specifically would allow for these factors to be assessed routinely in clinical are.