Sexual Functioning and Relationship Satisfaction in Lesbian and Bisexual Women with Vulvodynia
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1 Introduction

Vulvodynia: A chronic pain condition which affects the female external genitalia and as a result, often interferes with sexual activities.

(Binik, Pukall, Reissing, & Khalifé, 2001)

It is likely that there are multiple causes such as inflammation, immunologic factors and genetic predisposition.

Approximately 16% of women will experience vulvodynia (Harlow & Stewart, 2003)

Most common cause of painful intercourse in young adult women (Meana, Binik, Khalifé, & Cohen, 1997)

No published studies have explored vulvodynia in lesbian, bisexual or other sexual minority women

2 Research Questions

Does vulvodynia affect sexual functioning in lesbian and bisexual women?

Does vulvodynia affect relationship satisfaction in lesbian and bisexual women?

3 Method

89-item, Anonymous, On-Line Survey

Questions on:
- The Current Experience of Vulvo-vaginal Pain
- Gynaecological History
- Sexual Functioning (FSFI; Rosen et al., 2000)
- Relationship Satisfaction (RAS; Hendrick, 1988)
- Demographics

4 Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics (n = 25)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
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5 Results

Sexual Functioning in Lesbian/Bisexual Women with Vulvodynia, Heterosexual Women with Vulvodynia and Healthy Controls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Functioning</th>
<th>Lesbian/Bi</th>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Healthy Controls</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.8</td>
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6 Conclusions

Lesbian and bisexual women are experiencing vulvodynia.

Sexual functioning (i.e., desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, satisfaction, pain) is significantly affected.

Level of sexual functioning is comparable to heterosexual women with vulvodynia.

Relationship satisfaction is not affected and is comparable to healthy, married heterosexual women.

7 Implications

For Health Care Providers:
- Not all women who seek treatment for sexual pain are heterosexual.
- Vaginal penetration may still be an important component of a lesbian or bisexual woman’s sexuality.

For Research:
- Penile-vaginal intercourse may not be a suitable outcome measure.
- No longer necessary to limit treatment studies to heterosexual women.

8 References


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