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Research Article

TO DETERMINE THE PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION IN WOMEN WITH TYPE-2 DIABETES MELLITUS

¹Dr Amir Ali, ²Dr Abdullah Rehmat, ³Dr Wajeeha Fatima¹Allama Iqbal Medical College, Lahore²Quetta Institute of Medical Sciences³Riphah International University Islamabad

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Abstract:

Background: Sexual dysfunction (SD) is one of the important problems in diabetic patients. The present study aimed to determine the prevalence of sexual problems in Iranian women with type 2 diabetes mellitus.

Study Setting: A cross-sectional study was conducted in the medical department of Mayo Hospital Lahore, for the duration of one year, from March 2019 to March 2020.

Methods: One hundred and fifty women with type 2 diabetes were investigated. Most of the cases aged 40-44 years old. The mean of the total score of the FSFI questionnaire was 22. Patients were asked to complete two validated questionnaires: Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI) and The Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) as well as a demographic questionnaire. Analysis was performed using descriptive and analytical tests. P less than 0.05 was considered to be significant.

Results: The prevalence of sexual dysfunction was 78.7% (CI: 71.4-84.4); among these, 58% (CI: 50.0-65.6) reported problems in lubrication, 50% (CI: 42.1-57.9) complained of decreased sexual desire, 50% (CI: 42.1-57.9) had problems with arousal, 47.3% (CI: 39.5-55.3) had dyspareunia, 32.7% (CI: 25.7-40.5) complained of orgasmic dysfunction and 42.7% (CI: 35.0-50.7) reported problems in sexual satisfaction. With regard to the results of the HADS questionnaire, 58.7% (CI: 50.7-66.2) of the patients had depression and 96.7% (CI: 92.4-98.6) had anxiety.

Conclusion: This study showed the high prevalence of sexual dysfunction in diabetic women, especially among those complaining of depression. Health care professionals dealing with diabetic patients should be aware of possible presence of sexual dysfunction in female patients.

Keywords: Diabetes Mellitus, Sexual dysfunctions, Psychological, Female

Corresponding author:**Dr Amir Ali,**

Allama Iqbal Medical College, Lahore

QR code



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INTRODUCTION:

DM is known to cause different medical, psychological and sexual complications¹. Sexual dysfunction (SD) can also be an early sign of DM². The causes of SD in women can be divided into psychological and organic etiologies. Among non-gynecological organic etiologies, hormonal abnormalities, autonomic neuropathies (parasympathetic nervous system releases endothelial nitric oxide synthase, ENOS) as complications of DM, along with vascular insufficiency due to atherosclerosis are of most importance.^{3,4} It seems that somatic sensory system is affected by DM and introits vagina, labia minor and clitoris are the most deteriorated parts of genitalia in diabetic women. Although sexual complications are not present in all patients with DM, medications can improve blood flow in clitoris.^{5,6} It is argued that neuropathies, vascular impairments and psychological discomforts are the most recognized factors among the etiologies of SD in diabetic women.⁷ The prevalence of SD in diabetic women is estimated to be 20-80%.⁸ In the 1950s, SD in diabetic men caught attention, but SD in diabetic women remained completely neglected until Kolodny presented his article in 1971.⁹ Despite over 70 years of investigations in the field of DM in women, it has still remained a controversial issue.¹⁰ Sexual disorders have been studied extensively in men with DM,^{11,12} but the sexual problems in diabetic women has only recently received attention^{2,5,13} and some contradictory results have been presented.¹⁴ Sexual problems in both men and women with DM deserve further researches. Causes of SD are numerous and the neuro-endocrinological background is complex.³ Research on DM and female SD in diabetic women is not only scarring, but also suffer from methodological problems such as small sample size, absence of control group and lack of differentiating between different types of DM, presence of complications, psychosocial adjustments to the disease, quality of marital relationship and depressive disorders.² Despite over 70 years of research on the sexuality of females with diabetes, mellitus remains a controversial issue. There is a debate that the type of diabetes has an impact on the emergence of SD in women with diabetes.¹⁵ Islam, the religion of the vast majority of Iranians, has logically welcomed the positive attitudes towards legal sexual relationships in the context of marriage. There is a limited data regarding sexual dysfunction prevalence in patients with diabetes for both genders in Iran.¹⁵ Sexual health is an important, but often neglected component of health care in diabetic patients.¹⁶

PATIENTS AND METHODS:

A cross-sectional study was conducted in the medical department of Mayo Hospital Lahore, for the duration of one year, from March 2019 to March 2020. A study with a sample of 150 diabetic patients would have a power of 80 % to detect a difference of 5% (45-55%) at a significant level of 0.05. The actual sample size obtained for this study was 150 women with type 2 diabetes. The samples were selected in a consecutive procedure from June 2019 to December 2019. The patients were defined to be eligible for inclusion if they were female, had type 2 diabetes, were 18-65 years old, did not have any other health problems except for controlled hypothyroidism and complications of DM, were married for at least 1 year, and have had a stable marital relationship. The exclusion criteria were records of mastectomy, bilateral hysterectomy, pregnancy, presence of ongoing sexual disorder in patient's spouse, presence of sexual disorders before developing DM, and taking psychotropic drugs except for benzodiazepines. Patients were asked to complete three validated questionnaires, namely Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI), the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) and a demographic questionnaire at the clinics when they were on a waiting list. Privacy and confidentiality were assured. The medical records of the patients were used to obtain data on the duration of DM, use of medications (including antihypertensive medications, oral hypoglycemic agents, insulin), body mass index (BMI), HbA1c, micro vascular complications (such as neuropathy, retinopathy and nephropathy), macro vascular complications (such as hypertension, coronary artery disease), hyperlipidemia, history of cerebrovascular attack and previous myocardial infarction. Retinopathy was defined as having proliferative retinopathy in the past or at the time of the study assessed by a full examination of fundus performed by an ophthalmologist. Nephropathy was defined as a positive history of micro albuminuria, macro albuminuria, or based on positive results of 24-hour urine test. The values of glycosylated hemoglobin (HbA1c) were obtained from their medical records of their last clinic visits. This topic included recording each patient's age, educational status, occupation, income, number of children, homeownership, history of psychiatrist visits and history of any psychotropic drug consumption. Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI) Sexual function was measured in the women by using a standard questionnaire. Higher scores of the FSFI indicate fewer problems in sexual function and lower scores demonstrate more problems.

RESULTS:

One hundred and fifty women with type 2 diabetes mellitus (DM) were studied. Most cases were 40-44 years of age. The mean age of participants was 42 ± 10.1 years, the mean duration of DM was 7.57 ± 5.5 years, the mean of the body mass index (BMI) was 30.87 ± 4.52 , and the mean of the last HbA1c was 7.90 ± 1.75 . In these patients, among the complications of DM, diabetic neuropathy was the most frequent (57.3%), followed by diabetic nephropathy (25.3%), diabetic retinopathy (16%), and major cardiovascular problems (10.7%), respectively. The mean of the total score of Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI) was 22. Prevalence of SD in this sample was 78.7% (CI: 71.4-84.4). Among these, 58% (CI: 50.0-65.6) reported problems in lubrication, 50% (CI: 42.1-57.9) complained of decreased sexual desire, 50% (CI: 42.1-57.9) had problems with arousal, 47.3% (CI: 39.5-55.3) had dyspareunia, 32.7% (CI: 25.7-40.5) complained of orgasmic dysfunction and 42.7% (CI: 35.0-50.7) reported problems in sexual satisfaction. The results of the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) for frequency of anxiety and depression were as below: 3.3% (CI:

1.4-7.6) of the cases had no anxiety; mild anxiety was present in 11.3% (CI: 7.2-17.4). About 39.3% (CI: 31.9-47.3) had moderate anxiety and 46.0% (CI: 38.2-53.9) reported severe anxiety. About 41.3% of the cases had no depression; mild depression was present in 17.3%. Nearly 16.7% had moderate depression and 24.7% of the cases reported severe depression. With regard to the results of the HADS, 58.7% (CI: 50.7-66.2) of the patients had depression and 96.7% (CI: 92.4- 98.6) complained of anxiety.

The results showed that there was no significant association between the presence of SD and age of the patients (42.68 ± 10.4 vs. 39.65 ± 8.8 , $P=0.13$), BMI (31.1 ± 4.7 vs. 30.0 ± 3.8 , $P=0.20$), HbA1c level (7.93 ± 1.8 vs. 7.82 ± 1.7 , $P=0.76$), duration of DM (7.93 ± 5.7 vs. 6.25 ± 4.7 , $P=0.13$) and the presence of hypertension ($P=0.69$), menopause ($P=0.12$), type of treatment ($P=0.13$) and type of oral hypoglycemic agents ($P=0.97$). No significant association was also found between SD and the status of the disease control and complications of DM, as well (table 2).

The association between sexual dysfunction (SD) and complications of diabetes mellitus (DM)

Sexual dysfunction	Diabetic complication	Yes (number/percent)	No (number/percent)	Chi-square Test P value
Diabetic neuropathy	Yes	72 (83.7%)	14 (16.3%)	0.06
	No	46 (71.9%)	18 (28.1%)	
Diabetic retinopathy	Yes	21 (87.5%)	3 (12.5%)	0.192
	No	97 (77.0%)	29 (23%)	
Diabetic nephropathy	Yes	30 (78.9%)	8 (21.1%)	0.580
	No	88 (78.6%)	24 (21.4%)	
Cardiovascular complications	Yes	13 (81.3%)	3 (18.8%)	0.542
	No	105 (74.4)	29 (21.6%)	

DISCUSSION:

The findings indicated that the patients were greatly affected by SD (78.7%). Generally, high rates of SD in diabetic women are reported in different researches. A study in Iran on 50 married women with type 2 DM and 40 non-diabetic women in 2009 showed that DM significantly impairs sexual function.¹⁶ Another study performed in Iran on 200 patients (100 males and 100 females) with either type 1 or type 2 DM showed that SD prevalence was remarkably high among the mentioned cases.¹⁵ In this study, 82.5% of the patients of both genders reported that they have had experienced at least one type of SD.¹⁶ A study by Wallner about sexual functioning among 1291 diabetic and non-diabetic women in Boston, demonstrated that women with type 2 DM might experience similar sexual functioning to women without DM, but women with type 1 DM might report more SDs such as dyspareunia.²⁸ Another study was performed to evaluate the prevalence and correlation of female sexual function in 595 women with type 2 DM by Esposito in 2010. The overall prevalence of female SD among the type 2 diabetic women was 53.4%.²⁹ In our study, decreased libido was reported in 50% of the patients, arousal problems in 50%, problems in lubrication in 58%, problems with satisfaction in 42.5%, pain during intercourse in 47.3% and finally 32.7% had orgasmic problems. In a long-term research, entitled “epidemiology of diabetes interventions and complications” (EDIC) evaluating 625 female participants, it was determined that 35% of the women with type 1 DM met the criteria for female SD. The women with SD reported loss of libido (57%), orgasmic dysfunction (51%), problems in lubrication (47%), arousal dysfunction (38%) and pain during intercourse (21%).³⁰ Another study, also demonstrated reduced vaginal lubrication in diabetic women.²⁷ A review on female sexual disorders in women with DM showed that these women were at higher risks for developing SD than non-diabetic cases.³¹ Whether sexual desire is affected by diabetes remains controversial as some studies have shown a 20-78% decrease in desire in diabetic women (with the higher prevalence encountered in type 2 diabetes), while other studies have found no effect at all.^{2,8} The incidence of arousal problems in women with diabetes is also varied, depending on the type of diabetes and the definition of arousal, and varies from 14 to 75% to no effect at all.^{2,8,16} Regarding orgasm, as in our study, most studies have indicated problems in women with diabetes ranging from 10-84%.^{8,16} Finally, the risk of dyspareunia in women with diabetes varies from zero to 43%, with the higher prevalence being observed in type 2 diabetes.³⁴ Despite the inconsistency that exists in the literature concerning domains of sexual function, it seems evident that the effect of diabetes on female

sexuality is different and could affect all the domains of sexual function. In this study, we did not find any significant relationships between sexual dysfunction and age group. Ziaee et al. also reported the same results in Iran,¹⁵ but other studies, even from different countries have reported age as a determinant of SD in patients with DM.^{3,15} Fattemi et al. reported that age was negatively correlated with all domains of sexual functioning in women with type 2 DM.¹⁶ Esposito et al., from Italy, have reported no association between HbA1c level, duration of type 2 DM, hypertension or cigarette smoking and female SD; however, age, metabolic syndrome and atherogenic dyslipidemia had a significant relationship with female SD.²⁹ Enzlin et al. found no association between age, BMI, duration of type 1 DM, HbA1c level, use of medications, menopausal status or diabetic complications and female SD.² On the other hand, Bitzer et al. recommended that a careful glycemic control in women with type 2 DM was fundamental for restoring normal sexual function.⁹ In this study, 65.3% of the patients had depression and 95.8% had anxiety, according to the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) questionnaire. There was a significant correlation between depression and female SD. Depression is common in women with type 2 DM, which should be diagnosed and treated. One review found that the incidence of sexual problems in women with DM has been generally more associated with psychological factors than organic ones, especially coexisting depression.³¹ Consistently, Enzlin et al. demonstrated that SD in women with type 1 DM was related to depression.² In a research by Esposito et al. on 595 women with type 2 DM, The small differences in the frequency of sexual dysfunction between our study and other studies could be due to differences in sample size and recruitment of the group (general practitioners versus outpatient gynecology clinic or endocrinology clinic) and the used methodology (questionnaire versus questionnaire combined with a semi-structured interview) This study provided useful information about SD using standard instruments in a group of women with type 2 DM. The small sample size of the study did not allow us to detect any statistical significance of the relation between SD and age, duration of DM, hypertension, etc. We also did not control the study for the presence of depression as an independent factor leading to SD; however, depression is 2-fold more prevalent in diabetics compared with the general population and it should not be excluded. For future studies, a multivariate analysis is recommended in order to exclude the effects of covariates on the association of variables. In this study, SD in the patients was only diagnosed by the FSFI questionnaire, not by psychiatric clinical interview, according to DSM-IV-TR and not by

detecting the presence of distress in the patients using different instruments for assessing SD result in different estimates of SD prevalence.

CONCLUSION:

This study showed that the prevalence of sexual dysfunction (SD) is high in women with type 2 diabetes mellitus (DM) and glycemic control is not correlated with the frequency of the dysfunction in these patients; however, SD is especially highly prevalent among those with comorbidity of depression.

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