

FEMALE URINARY INCONTINENCE AND URGENCY – IMPACT ON WOMEN’S AND THEIR PARTNERS’ SEXUAL LIFE

Hypothesis/ aims of study

To study the impact of female urinary incontinence and urgency on women’s and their partners’ sexual life and to elucidate the concordance of answers within couples.

Study design, materials and methods

Women (18-74 years) with urinary incontinence (UI) and/or urgency (n=206) were consecutively recruited from four outpatient clinics. Those with a partner (n=170) completed additional questionnaires regarding relationship and sexual life and were asked to give a similar questionnaire to their partner. In total, 64% of the partners participated. The study comprised 99 couples with an active sexual relationship.

Results

Out of the 99 women 44 % had stress urinary incontinence, 32 % mixed urinary incontinence, 12 % urge urinary incontinence and 12 % urgency. Mean age of the women was 52 years (median 52, range 25-74). Mean age of the partners was 54 years (median 54, range 27-76). All partners were men. Most couples were married (79 %). For 91 % the length of their relationship was > 5 years.

Most men (92 %) and women (90 %) considered sexuality to be rather or very important in their lives. Almost all (95 %) were satisfied with their partner relationship. However, several men (22 %) and women (43 %) thought that the urinary problems impaired their sexual life. According to 23 % of the men and 39 % of the women, the woman leaked urine during sexual activity. The majority of these women (84 %) considered this a problem, 65 % of their partners did not. Except for this disparity, the rest of the answers were significant concordant within the couples. Overall, 22 % of the men and 43 % of the women stated that the female urinary symptoms impaired their sexual life.

Table 1. Sexual life in 99 women with UI and/or urgency and their partners

		Men	Women	Difference
		n ^a	n ^a	men/women
				p-value
Negative impact on sexual life due to the woman's UI/urgency	No	76	56	0.002
	Yes	22	42	
Difficulty for the women reaching orgasm ^b	No	73	72	0.500
	Yes	21	26	
Worry about the woman having urinary leakage during sexual activity	No	92	49	0.000
	Yes	6	48	
The woman has urinary leakage during sexual activity	No	75	60	0.015
	Yes	22	38	
If urinary leakage during sexual activity: -It is a problem	No	15	6	0.000
	Yes	8	32	
-Urinary leakage during foreplay	No	15	33	0.541
	Yes	3	4	
-Urinary leakage during clitoris stimulation	No	17	31	0.266
	Yes	1	6	
-Urinary leakage during penetration	No	9	19	0.925
	Yes	9	18	
- Urinary leakage during orgasm	No	10	20	0.916
	Yes	8	17	

^a Since some men and women did not answer all the questions the number of responses varied.

^b "No" stands for Fairly rarely, Almost never, Never.

Assuming an alpha error of 0,05 the statistical power was post hoc calculated to be 89 % for "negative impact on sexual life due to the woman's UI/urgency", 100 % for "worry about the women having urinary leakage during sexual activity", 68 % for "the women has urinary leakage during sexual activity" and 98 % for "if urinary leakage during sexual activity: It is a problem".

Interpretation of results

Female UI and urgency had a negative effect on sexual life in almost half of the women and a negative influence in every fifth of the partners' sexual life. Most of the partners did not consider urinary leakage during sexual activity as a problem, but the majority of the women did. Overall, the concordance of the answers within the couples was high. A need for advice due to women's urinary disorders concerning sexual issues was found in one fifth of the couples.

Concluding message

This study highlights the negative effect female UI and urgency may have on women and their partners. It is, thus, essential that health care providers get a deeper knowledge about this impact in order to meet the patients and partners need for information and advice about sexual function in the clinical situation.

<i>Specify source of funding or grant</i>	Conflicts of interest: none.
<i>Is this a clinical trial?</i>	No
<i>What were the subjects in the study?</i>	HUMAN
<i>Was this study approved by an ethics committee?</i>	Yes
<i>Specify Name of Ethics Committee</i>	The Ethical Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Umeå, Sweden
<i>Was the Declaration of Helsinki followed?</i>	Yes
<i>Was informed consent obtained from the patients?</i>	Yes