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The Impact of Erectile Dysfunction on Partners of Men with ED

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Abstract

A survey of 129 adult partners of men with erectile dysfunction found high levels of relationship stress and a general lack of communication.

A significant majority of respondents:

- Experienced *some impact* or a *major impact* on their confidence, self-esteem, overall happiness, and feelings about their relationship.
- Were more open than their partners in talking and ED, exploring alternate means of sexual satisfaction, and getting relationship help from a counselor, therapist, or intimacy coach.
- Were very interested in information about ED causes and treatments, as well as a directory of doctors and counselors who treat ED and related problems.
- Were very interested in ways to improve their sex lives.

Methodology

A survey instrument consisting of 21 questions was developed and presented on an online survey platform¹. Participants were recruited for the survey through posts on online media².

A total of 152 participants began the survey, but 23 either (1) did not have a partner suffering from ED, or (2) did not complete the survey. These 23 responses were discarded.

Terminology

In this report, *patient* refers to the man with erectile dysfunction; *partner* refers to the patient's partner (the survey respondent).

¹ SurveyMonkey.com

² EDtreatment.info, FaceBook.com, FrankTalk.org, LinkedIn.com, SupportGroups.com, Patient.info, ProstateCancerInfoLink.ning.com, Reddit.com

Results

Patient/Partner Demographic Data

PATIENT AGE

MINIMUM	MEAN	MEDIAN	MAXIMUM
27	53.9	55.0	79

PARTNER AGE

MINIMUM	MEAN	MEDIAN	MAXIMUM
23	52.0	51.3	76

PARTNER GENDER

MALE	FEMALE
10	119
7.8%	92.3%

DEGREE OF ED*

MILD	MODERATE	SEVERE
5	59	65
3.9%	47.7%	50.4%

* The degree of Erectile Dysfunction was self-assessed by survey participants and does not correspond to standard SHIM³ assessments.

³ SHIM: Sexual Health Inventory for Men is a standard questionnaire used to categorize Erectile Dysfunction.

Treatment Data

PATIENTS SOUGHT TREATMENT FROM:

FAMILY DOCTOR	UROLOGIST, MEN'S HEALTH CLINIC, OR OTHER SPECIALIST	COUNSELOR, COACH, OR THERAPIST	NO TREATMENT SOUGHT
62	33	10	52
48.1%	25.6%	7.8%	40.3%

REASONS FOR NOT SEEKING TREATMENT (IN PARTNER'S OPINION)

EMBARASSMENT	FEAR OF OUTCOME	COST
50	19	19
96.2%	36.5%	36.5%

Impact Data

HOW HAS THE PATIENT BEEN IMPACTED? (IN PARTNER'S OPINION)

	NO IMPACT	VERY LITTLE IMPACT	SOME IMPACT	MAJOR IMPACT
PATIENT'S CONFIDENCE	2	13	55	50
	1.67%	10.83%	45.83%	41.67%
PATIENT'S SELF ESTEEM	5	17	54	44
	4.17%	14.17%	45.00%	36.67%
PATIENT'S OVERALL HAPPINESS	6	22	54	38
	5.00%	18.33%	45.00%	31.67%
PATIENT'S FEELINGS TOWARD RELATIONSHIP	9	25	49	37
	7.50%	20.83%	40.83%	30.83%

HOW HAS THE PARTNER BEEN IMPACTED?

	NO IMPACT	VERY LITTLE IMPACT	SOME IMPACT	MAJOR IMPACT
PARTNERS'S CONFIDENCE	11	17	38	54
	9.17%	14.17%	31.67%	45.00%
PARTNERS'S SELF ESTEEM	15	16	29	60
	12.50%	13.33%	24.17%	50.00%
PARTNERS'S OVERALL HAPPINESS	8	13	52	47
	6.67%	10.83%	43.33%	39.17%
PARTNERS'S ENERGY LEVEL	19	29	48	24
	15.83%	24.17%	40.00%	20.00%
PARTNERS'S FEELINGS TOWARD RELATIONSHIP	13	11	45	51
	10.83%	9.17%	37.50%	42.50%

COMMENTS REGARDING IMPACT ON PARTNER

We have included a sample of the open-ended comments from partners about how they are impacted by the patient's erectile dysfunction. These quotes show the profound distress of those in relationships with men suffering from ED.

1. *He's too focused on his embarrassment and anger at the situation to hear me when I try to tell him how rejected I feel.*
2. *I feel guilty if I have a climax because he rarely can sustain any activity to that point. And it's exhausting trying to keep things going when he really isn't able but wants to keep trying. And I feel guilty about not wanting to keep working at it when it just doesn't work.*
3. *I love him dearly but it's hard not to have intimacy. He avoids contact because he thinks it might lead to something and he will fail.*
4. *I refuse to give up sex, masturbation does not relieve the "pressure" the same as sex did, I am beginning to mentally decide if cheating is my only solution... it would be the first time in 40 years of monogamy but may be the only way to stay sane. It is not fair to me to give up sex after 38 years of great sex, I resent it more and more.*

5. *I feel like he doesn't care enough about the impact it has on me to try the available means of help. He is in total control. I have none. I would try whatever to make things better if the roles were reversed.*
6. *He has become angry and argumentative and when it first started 12 years ago blamed me.*
7. *Mostly I accept it, but when he told me he could get an erection when he used pornography I felt very inadequate. I also felt annoyed with him for not realizing it was a hurtful thing to say to me. These days we communicate very little on the subject, and it may well be that we don't stay together. I put that he hadn't sought help because of embarrassment but he says that's not the case. If you'd included an option for "don't know", that's what I'd have said.*
8. *I do sometimes feel that he no longer finds me sexually attractive, or that he no longer gets aroused by my advances.*
9. *I wish he would at least discuss it with others with ED and/or his family physician. It hurts me that without physical attention, it makes me feel like he doesn't love me.*
10. *I miss the physical closeness we once shared. I feel bad for him that he can no longer satisfy his needs and I understand his frustration. However, my need for physical closeness, even simply cuddling, aren't being addressed and sometimes I feel ignored or just very sad.*
11. *Don't want to start anything as know we can't have full sex. This makes him feel unwanted and me quite sad as we had a fantastic sex life in the early days. Now there is not much effort from either of us. He is reluctant to seek help again as the pill he had the first time failed to make a difference.*
12. *We are almost over. Teetering on the edge of breakup. Not because of the actual ED, but because of his lack of ability to gain a proper erection he feels emasculated and turns to porn, lots of porn, which then makes his ED worse as he can't get turned on at all by so called 'normal' sex. And makes me feel like a worthless unwanted piece of unattractive garbage.*
13. *Lack of intimacy has led to problems in other areas of relationship. Self-worth is zero.*
14. *I feel lost, he has a solution but still the physical connection that used to be between us is lacking, he seems scared to start anything just in case he can't finish it and sees no other side to intimacy other than sex and that leave me*

on the outside of what to everyone else is a loving happy marriage looking in on the man I love but who is making me miserable.

15. *It's made me think of him as just a friend. It's made me think of leaving him so that I could have a normal sex life.*
16. *I feel like we are roommates barely emotionally connected anymore. I hate this and the future seems grim.*
17. *If I ever bring the subject up then he sees it as putting pressure on him and then he feels guilty and then he avoids me completely- it's a constant vicious cycle. We do attempt other things short of intercourse which we both gain satisfaction from but there's always an underlying uneasiness which causes problems.*
18. *It has been difficult because he doesn't want to talk about it. I feel very lonely and disconnected from my husband. I think he must feel the same way but avoids talking about it.*
19. *My feelings about our relationship are fine. I just wish he would take this more seriously and treat it like the issue it is. I wish he was more interested in shopping for toys to help finish me off when he can't. So many articles I read are about supporting our man and his ego. I completely agree but these articles don't address the sexual frustration and needs of the woman or how to overcome those obstacles.*
20. *I want to feel desirable I've tried everything to entice him I've tried diet and exercises for myself, new lingerie, I've tried going down on him nothing works I feel like a failure as a woman.*
21. *I miss the intimacy where it was just automatic and I didn't have to worry about him not getting and or losing an erection. I'm grieving at the moment I guess. We are solid right now, but this is definitely a weight we weren't prepared for. We thought this happened to "old dudes."*
22. *It makes me question if he is even attracted to me. Makes me wonder why he even wants to be with me since we can't have sex. Just makes me feel horrible and worthless because we can't afford a doctor and so we just never have sex.*
23. *He acts highly immature and defensive when he loses his erection during sex. Causing him to withdraw in many ways. He shuts down when I try and discuss it and he won't try other forms of intimacy. I notice when he drinks he seems more willing to try things. He doesn't touch me, communicate*

nor does he initiate sex. It's taken a major toll on my sex appeal, self esteem and self-worth.

24. I am madly in love but I just wish he wouldn't abandon me when we try sex and he can't keep it up. I need his support more than ever just as he needs assurance that his ED doesn't define him.

HOW WELL DOES THE PATIENT UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF HIS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION ON PARTNER? (IN PARTNER'S OPINION)

VERY WELL	SOMEWHAT	VERY LITTLE	NOT AT ALL
20	38	32	30
16.7%	31.7%	26.7%	25.0%

COMFORT LEVELS

	PATIENT COMFORT LEVEL (IN PARTNER'S OPINION)				PARTNER COMFORT LEVEL			
	NOT AT ALL	NOT VERY	FAIRLY	VERY	NOT AT ALL	NOT VERY	FAIRLY	VERY
TALKING ABOUT HIS CONDITION	39	45	17	16	11	34	41	31
	33.33%	38.46%	14.53%	13.68%	9.40%	29.06%	35.04%	26.50%
EXPLORING OTHER MEANS OF SEXUAL SATISFACTION	39	34	28	16	12	41	32	32
	33.33%	29.06%	23.93%	13.68%	10.26%	35.04%	27.35%	27.35%
SEEING A COUNSELOR, INTIMACY COACH, OR THERAPIST TO IMPROVE THE RELATIONSHIP	68	29	14	6	21	37	35	24
	58.12%	24.79%	11.97%	5.13%	17.95%	31.62%	29.91%	20.51%

Note that, in the table above, the partners of men with ED are significantly more comfortable than the patients in discussing ED, exploring other means of sexual satisfaction, and seeking help from a counselor.

Types of Help Wanted

We asked participants what type of information or services they would most like to see.

INFORMATION SERVICES

	NO INTEREST	NOT VERY INTERESTED	SOMEWHAT INTERESTED	VERY INTERESTED
CAUSES OF ED	6	7	30	64
	5.61%	6.54%	28.04%	59.81%
MEDICAL TREATMENTS FOR ED	4	2	27	74
	3.74%	1.87%	25.23%	69.16%
COUNSELING FOR ED	9	16	25	57
	8.41%	14.95%	23.36%	53.27%
DIRECTORY OF DOCTORS FOR ED	8	12	28	59
	7.48%	11.21%	26.17%	55.14%
DIRECTORY OF COUNSELORS FOR ED	8	17	29	53
	7.48%	15.89%	27.10%	49.53%
DIRECTORY OF PENILE IMPLANT SURGEONS	38	27	23	19
	35.51%	25.23%	21.50%	17.76%
IMPROVING THEIR SEX LIFE	4	7	28	68
	3.74%	6.54%	26.17%	63.55%
DIRECTORY OF ED SUPPORT GROUPS	28	15	25	39
	26.17%	14.02%	23.36%	36.45%
ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM	21	14	31	41
	19.63%	13.08%	28.97%	38.32%
ONLINE FORUM FOR PARTNERS ONLY	16	10	29	52
	14.95%	9.35%	27.10%	48.60%

PREFERRED SUPPORT GROUP FORMATS

	NO INTEREST	NOT VERY INTERESTED	SOMEWHAT INTERESTED	VERY INTERESTED
IN PERSON	40	32	23	12
	37.38%	29.91%	21.50%	11.21%
ONLINE FORUM	19	9	43	36
	17.76%	8.41%	40.19%	33.64%
ONLINE SMALL GROUP MEETINGS	51	29	20	7
	47.66%	27.10%	18.69%	6.54%

Conclusions

Erectile dysfunction is generally not taken seriously in our society. In fact, it is often the subject of jokes.

This study shows that ED has a profound negative impact on the *partners* of men with ED, including their confidence, self-esteem, and general happiness.

Because of feelings of embarrassment and shame, men are often uncomfortable talking about their condition or seeking help. This often compounds the emotional issues faced by their partners.

Partners are very interested in solutions to their problems, including information on treatments, and support services. In their own opinions, partners are more comfortable than men with ED in discussing the problem and seeking help.

The highest level of interest among partners (63.5% Very Interested) was for improving their sex lives. This suggests a strong opportunity for intimacy coaches and counselors.

Related Study

Comprehensive Study on the Impact of Erectile Dysfunction

Published: March 30, 2018

A survey of 597 adult men suffering from erectile dysfunction found high levels of stress, dissatisfaction with medical care and treatment options, and mental health issues.

<https://edtreatment.info/ed-impact-study/>

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