

Patterns of Libido, Sexual Activity and Sexual Performance in Female Migraineurs

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Abstract : Although migraine traditionally has been assumed to convey a relative decrease in libido, sexual activity and sexual performance, recent data have suggested that the female migraine population is far from homogenous in this regard. We sought to determine the levels of libido, sexual activity and sexual performance in the female migraine patient population both generally and according to clinical phenotype. In this single-blind study, a consecutive series of sexually active new female patients ages 25-55 initially presenting to a university-based headache clinic and having a >1 year history of migraine were asked to complete anonymously a survey assessing their sexual histories generally and as they related to their headache disorder and the 19-item Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI). To serve as 2 separate control groups, 100 sexually active females with no history of migraine and 100 female migraineurs from the general (non-clinic) population but matched for age, marital status, educational background and socioeconomic status completed a similar survey. Over a period of 3 months, 188 consecutive migraine patients were invited to participate. Twenty declined, and 28 of the remaining 160 potential subjects failed to meet the inclusion criterion utilized for "sexually active" (ie, heterosexual intercourse at a frequency of > once per month in each of the preceding 6 months). In all groups younger age ($p<.005$), higher educational level attained ($p<.05$) and higher socioeconomic status ($p<.025$) correlated with a higher monthly frequency of intercourse and a higher likelihood of intercourse resulting in orgasm. Relative to the 100 control subjects with no history of migraine, the two migraine groups (total $n=232$) reported a lower monthly frequency of intercourse and recorded a lower FSFI score (both $p<.025$), but the contribution to this difference came primarily from the chronic migraine (CM) subgroup ($n=92$). Patients with low frequency episodic migraine (LFEM) and mid frequency episodic migraine (MFEM) reported a higher FSFI score, higher monthly frequency of intercourse, higher likelihood of intercourse resulting in orgasm and higher likelihood of multiple active sex partners than controls. All migraine subgroups reported a decreased likelihood of engaging in intercourse during an active migraine attack, but relative to the CM subgroup ($8/92=9\%$), a higher proportion of patients in the LFEM ($12/49=25\%$), MFEM ($14/67=21\%$) and high frequency episodic migraine (HFEM: $6/14=43\%$) subgroups reported utilizing intercourse - and orgasm specifically - as a means of potentially terminating a migraine attack. In the clinic vs no-clinic groups there were no significant differences in the dependent variables assessed. Research subjects with LFEM and MFEM may report a level of libido, frequency of intercourse and likelihood of orgasm-associated intercourse that exceeds what is reported by age-matched controls free of migraine. Many patients with LFEM, MFEM and HFEM appear to utilize intercourse/orgasm as a means to potentially terminate an acute migraine attack.

Keywords : migraine, female, libido, sexual activity, phenotype

Conference Title : ICPS 2022 : International Conference on Psychiatry and Sexology

Conference Location : Istanbul, Türkiye

Conference Dates : November 29-30, 2022