

Perceptions about the sexuality of women with fibromyalgia syndrome: a phenomenological study

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Aims: The aim of this study was to explore and understand the perceptions and experiences of women with fibromyalgia syndrome regarding their sexuality. **Background:** Fibromyalgia syndrome is a chronic pathology, which compromises a woman's physical, mental and emotional health.

Although concerns related to sexuality are commonly reported, research has tended to focus on the physical symptoms. **Design:** An interpretive qualitative research methodology using Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics was carried out. **Methods:** This qualitative study explores the sexuality of women with fibromyalgia syndrome. A focus group and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 women with fibromyalgia syndrome. Data were collected between April - June 2014.

Participants were recruited until findings reached saturation. **Findings:** Three themes define the perception of sexuality for these women: (i) Physical impact: don't touch, don't look; (ii) Sexuality and identity: fighting against their loss; (iii) Impact on the relationship: sexuality as a way of connecting the couple. **Conclusion:** Despite limitations, sexuality is important for the identity and quality of life of women with fibromyalgia syndrome. Together with the physical symptomology, guilt, fear and a lack of understanding compromise the coping process. Women need the support of their partner, their socio-family environment and health professionals. Nurses can aid the successful adjustment to sexual problems related to fibromyalgia syndrome. © 2017 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

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