

# Sexuality amongst heterosexual women with morbid obesity in a bariatric surgery programme: A qualitative study

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## **Abstract**

**Aims:** The objective of this study is to describe and understand the experiences of sexuality amongst heterosexual women with morbid obesity (MO) who are in a bariatric surgery program. **Background:** Morbid obesity is a chronic, metabolic disease that affects women's physical, psychological and sexual health. MO is associated with anxiety, depression and body image disorders. Bariatric surgery is a reliable method for weight loss in people with MO. **Design:** A qualitative descriptive study research design was adopted. **Methods:** Twenty-one heterosexual women with MO in a bariatric surgery program were recruited through purposive sampling. Data collection included individual semi-structured interviews conducted between November 2018 and May 2019. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using a computer-assisted qualitative data. **Findings:** Three main themes emerged from the analysis: (1) trapped in a body that limits my sexuality; (2) between neglect and hope and (3) the partner as a source of support for sexuality in women with MO. **Conclusion:** Women hide a body that they do not accept and ignore their own sexuality, focusing on that of their partner. Although the women have doubts about their partners' desire for them, they share the decision-making process with them whilst waiting for bariatric surgery, on which they place all of their hopes for improved sexuality and quality of life. **Impact:** The findings highlight the importance of exploring the experiences and sexual issues faced by heterosexual women with MO in a bariatric surgery program. Bariatric nurses have a privileged position to assess these women's sexuality, recommend alternatives to sexual intercourse or refer them to sexologists. As part of the multidisciplinary team, nurses can contribute to managing the expectations of women with MO and their partners in relation to the improvement of their sex lives following bariatric surgery. © 2021 John Wiley & Sons Ltd

## **Author keywords**

bariatric surgery; female sexual dysfunction; morbid obesity; nursing; qualitative research; sexuality; Women's Health Services