

# Sexual Morbidity, Quality of Life, and Patient-Provider Communication Among Ovarian Cancer Patients And Survivors

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## Background

- Sexual function is increasingly recognized as an essential component of physical and emotional well-being among people living with cancer.
- Women treated for ovarian cancer (OC) often report adverse sexual effects, yet evidence suggests oncology providers rarely discuss sexual health with their patients.

## Aims

- We characterized sexual morbidity, quality of life (QOL), and health care team (HCT) communication among a community sample of OC patients.

## Methods

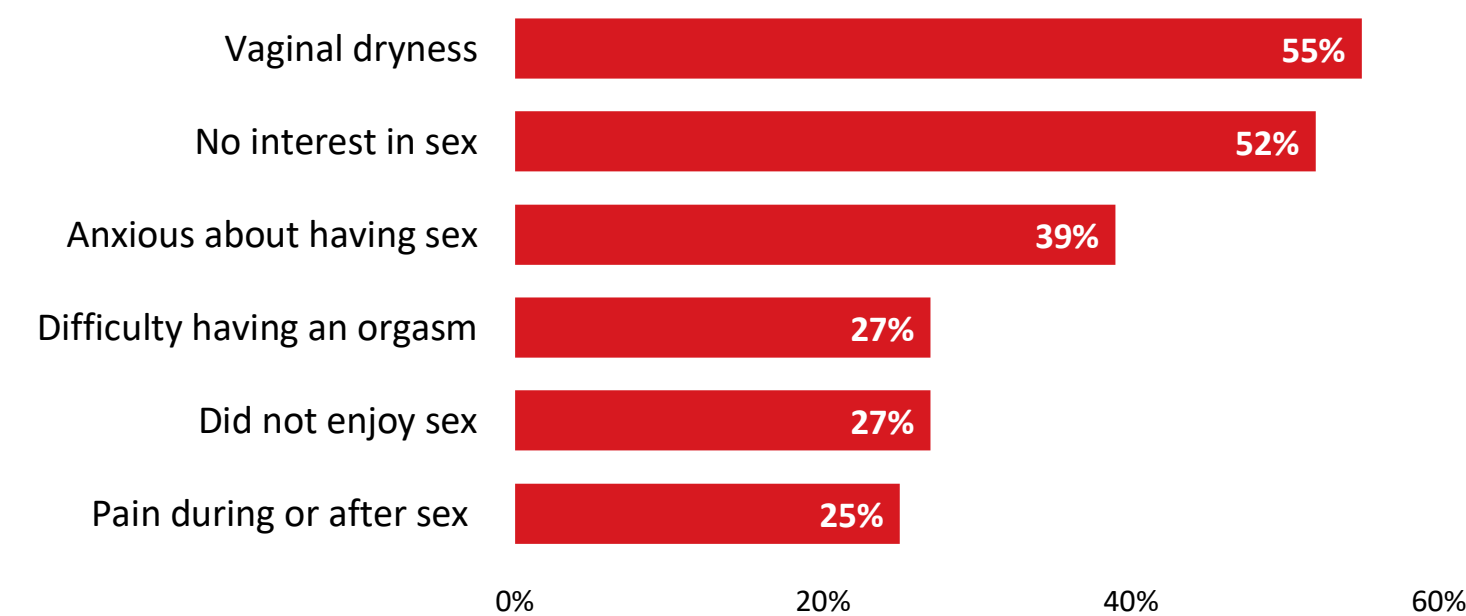
- 60 OC patients and survivors who enrolled in Cancer Support Community's online Cancer Experience Registry® completed questions to assess sexual morbidity (6 yes/no items assessing symptoms in the past six months, summed to create a sexual morbidity score; range: 0-6), its impact on QOL, and HCT communication regarding sexual health and psychosocial concerns.
- Frequencies and correlations between sexual morbidity measures, HCT communication, QOL indices (assessed using PROMIS-29 v2.0 symptom burden subscales), and socio-demographics were examined.

## Participants

	N = 60	Mean or n	SD or %
Age (years)		58	11
		Range: 21-80	
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
Non-Hispanic White	50		83%
Hispanic	4		7%
Black/African American	3		5%
<b>Diagnosis/Recurrence</b>			
Time Since Diagnosis (years)	3.7		4.4
		Range: <1-25	
Diagnosed within past 2 years	23		39%
Ever diagnosed with metastatic cancer	21		35%
Experienced a recurrence	19		32%
<b>Ovarian Cancer Sub-type</b>			
Epithelial	23		38%
Germ cell	2		3%
Other	9		15%
Don't know or not applicable	26		43%
<b>Treatment History</b>			
TAH-BSO (surgery)	50		83%
Current chemotherapy / Ever chemotherapy	25 / 57		44% / 95%
Current hormonal therapy / Ever hormonal therapy	4 / 7		7% / 12%
<b>Primary Provider for Cancer Care</b>			
Gynecologic oncologist	51		85%
Medical oncologist	9		15%

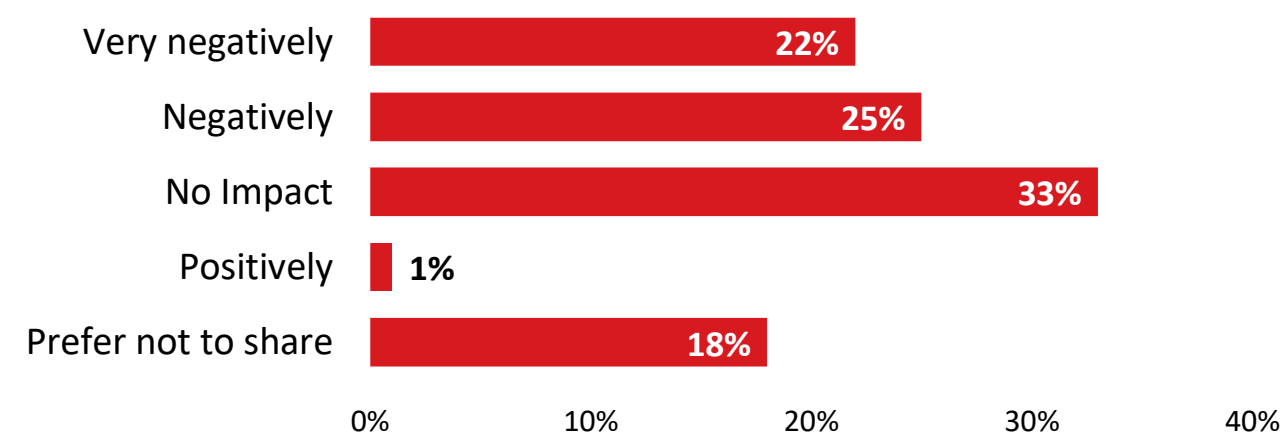
## Results

### Sexual Morbidity in Past 6 Months



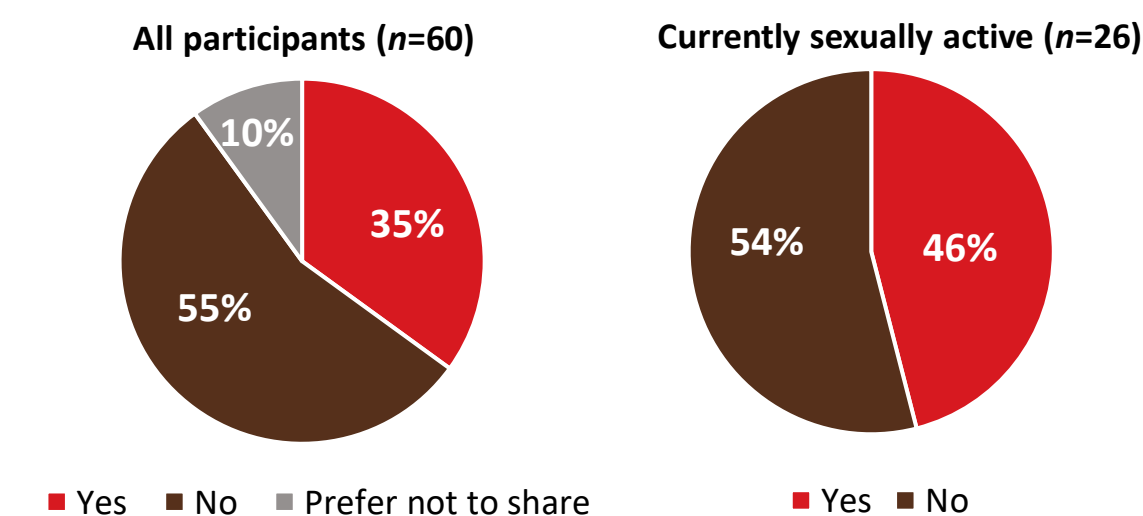
- 70% of OC patients reported experiencing at least one symptom of sexual morbidity.
- 'Vaginal dryness' and 'no interest in sex' were endorsed by a majority of OC patients.

### How Has Cancer Diagnosis Impacted Your Sexual Life?



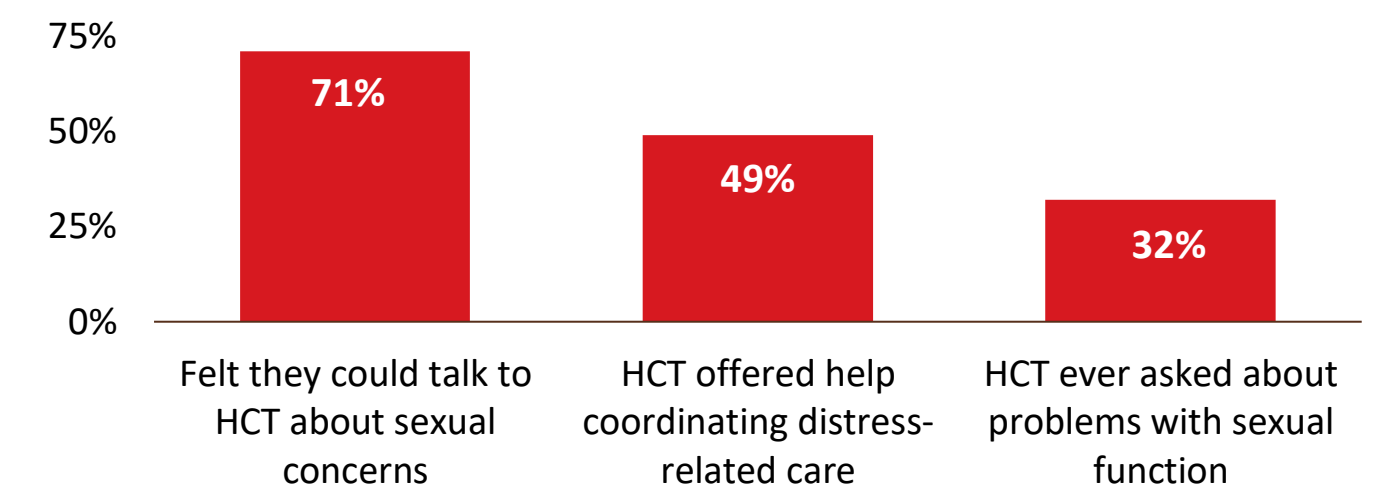
- Nearly one-half of OC patients (47%) reported that cancer very negatively or negatively impacted their sexual life.

### Is Sexual Activity a Source of Distress for You?



- Sexual activity was a source of distress for many OC patients, regardless of whether they reported being currently sexually active.

### HCT Communication About Sexual Concerns



- Most OC patients (71%) felt they could talk to a member of their HCT about sexual concerns, but only one-third (32%) reported ever being asked about sexual function problems by a member of their HCT.

### Sexual Morbidity and Negative Impact of Ovarian Cancer on Sexual Life Are Associated with Poorer Quality of Life

Sexual Morbidity (total score)	r	p
Depression	.31	.018*
Anxiety	.29	.025*
Fatigue	.31	.019*
Sleep Disturbance	.30	.023*

Negative Impact of Cancer on Sexual Life	r	p
Depression	.46	.001*
Anxiety	.46	.001*
Fatigue	.29	.044*
Sleep Disturbance	.14	.350

- In bivariate analysis, greater sexual morbidity was associated with greater depression, anxiety, fatigue, and sleep disturbance among OC patients.
- Reporting a negative impact of OC diagnosis on sexual life was also associated with greater depression, anxiety, and fatigue.

## Implications and Conclusions

- Ovarian cancer patients report substantial concerns related to sexual function and well-being, with greater sexual morbidity associated with poorer emotional well-being, fatigue, and sleep disturbance.
- Few ovarian cancer patients report being asked about problems with sexual function by their health care team, despite most patients being open to discussing sexual concerns.
- Findings highlight a need for oncology care providers to initiate conversations surrounding sexual function and for the development of relevant evidence-based supportive care programs.

## Acknowledgments

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## References

- Hill, EM (2016) Quality of life and mental health among women with ovarian cancer: examining the role of emotional and instrumental social support seeking. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 21 (5):551-561