

SEXUALITY AND THE USE OF ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCES OF ABUSE IN WOMEN WITH EATING DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT – Sixty eight female patients, treated at the Clinic of Neuroses in Warsaw, the Clinic of Neuroses in Kraków, and the Center for the Treatment of Eating Disorders in Gliwice, were included in this study. Twenty two of them were diagnosed with anorexia, and forty six with bulimia.

A preliminary analysis of their sexual behaviors revealed that the anorectic patients start showing interest in the opposite sex at an earlier age than patients with bulimia. However, the anorectic females, more frequently than bulimic, reported that these interests were never realized. 36% of patients with anorexia and 29% of patients with bulimia had no sexual initiation. Among those, who had undertaken and continued sexual relationships, there were no differences between anorectic and bulimic patients as to the role of sex in their life, the choice of their partners, the frequency of sexual engagements, the feelings surrounding their sex acts, and the frequency of achieving orgasm. When evaluating the negative aspects of their own sexuality, 28% of patients with bulimia and 9% of patients with anorexia reported difficulties in achieving orgasm; 13% of bulimic and 9% of anorectic females reported difficulties in getting aroused, 22% of bulimic and 17% of anorectic females reported fearing the sexual initiation.

Of the 68 women in the study, 10 were systematically drinking alcohol in amounts harmful to their health (2 with anorexia and 8 with bulimia). Thirty nine patients (15 with anorexia and 24 with bulimia) had behind them periods of systematical abuse of sedative/hypnotic agents. Only 3 of the patients in the whole group (1 with bulimia and 2 with anorexia) reported prolonged periods of psychoactive substance use and difficulties with withdrawal. Two of them used amphetamine and one cannabis. Sporadic use of amphetamine or its derivatives was reported by 10 patients (5 with anorexia and 5 with bulimia), and 14 patients (3 with anorexia and 11 with bulimia) reported sporadic use of cannabis. The reason given by women with bulimia for using alcohol or drugs was a desire to diminish appetite, while anorectic patients claimed curiosity and a desire to experiment with these agents.

Key words: women, sexuality, eating disorders, alcohol, psychoactive substances.