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# Relationship between urinary incontinence and sexuality: an integrative review

Relación entre la infección del tracto urinario y la sexualidad: una revisión integradora

Relação entre incontinência urinária e sexualidade: uma revisão integrativa

## ABSTRACT

Objective: Analyze according to the literature, the impacts of urinary incontinence on the sexual life of adults. Method: This is an integrative literature review study using the PICO strategy (Population/Intervention/Comparison/Outcome) in the databases Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE), Latin American & Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (Lilacs) and in the Specialized Bibliographic Database in the area of Nursing (BDENF). Full texts were included, with a time frame from January 2015 to February 2021, in Portuguese, English and Spanish. Results: Five studies were selected for analysis. Of the 5 (100%) studies, three (60%) specifically evaluated the feelings experienced by incontinent women and their relationship with the quality of sexual life. Conclusion: Urinary incontinence implies, in addition to the biological aspect, important repercussions in sensitive areas, such as sexuality. Thus, it is necessary to provide these people with support and information on prevention, treatment and rehabilitation care.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Urinary Incontinence; Sexuality; Quality of life.

## RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar, según la literatura, los impactos de la incontinencia urinaria en la vida sexual de los adultos. Métodos: Se trata de un estudio de revisión integradora de la literatura utilizando la estrategia PICO (Población / Intervención / Comparación / Resultados) en las bases de datos Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE), Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (Lilacs) y en la Bibliographic Database Especializado en el área de Enfermería (BDENF). Se incluyeron textos completos, con un período de enero de 2015 a febrero de 2021, en portugués, inglés y español. Resultados: Se seleccionaron cinco estudios para su análisis. De los 5 (100%) estudios, tres (60%) evaluaron específicamente los sentimientos que experimentan las mujeres con incontinencia y su relación con la calidad de vida sexual. Conclusión: La IU implica, además del aspecto biológico, repercusiones en áreas como la sexualidad. Por lo tanto, es necesario prestar a estas personas apoyo e información sobre cuidados de prevención, tratamiento y rehabilitación.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Incontinencia urinaria; Sexualidad; Calidad de vida.

## RESUMO

Objetivo: Analisar, conforme a literatura, os impactos da incontinência urinária sobre a vida sexual de adultos. Método: Trata-se de um estudo de revisão integrativa de literatura utilizando a estratégia PICO (População/Intervenção/Comparação/Resultados) nas bases de dados Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE), Literatura Latino Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde (Lilacs) e na Base de Dados Bibliográficas Especializada na área de Enfermagem (BDENF). Incluíram-se textos completos, com recorte temporal de janeiro de 2015 à fevereiro de 2021, nos idiomas português, inglês e espanhol. Resultados: Foram selecionados cinco estudos para análise. Dos 5 (100%) estudos, três (60%) avaliaram especificamente os sentimentos experimentados por mulheres incontinentes e sua relação com a qualidade de vida sexual. Conclusão: A Incontinência Urinária implica, além do aspecto biológico, repercussões em áreas como a sexualidade. Desse modo, é necessário prestar a essas pessoas suporte e informações sobre prevenção, tratamento e cuidados de reabilitação.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Incontinência Urinária; Sexualidade; Qualidade de Vida.

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## INTRODUCTION

**U**rinary Incontinence (UI) is defined as the involuntary loss of urine and is a highly prevalent problem that affects patients of both sexes and different ages. It can be clinically classified into several types, according to symptomatic and urodynamic criteria, the main types are: Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI), Urge Urinary Incontinence (UUI) and Mixed Urinary Incontinence (MUI).<sup>1</sup>

Different types of UI can negatively impact the quality of life of affected individuals and their families.<sup>2</sup> The population most affected by urinary incontinence corresponds to the female population. With a multifactorial etiology, the main predisposing factors related to this population are age, pelvic floor lesions associated with vaginal birth, number of births, post-menopause, obesity and others.<sup>3</sup>

Authors talk about the negative impact on the quality of life of women affected by the problem, resulting in implications in daily and social activities, physical and emotional limitations, as well as in what concerns the perception of health.<sup>4</sup>

Sexuality, in its range, is one of the fields affected by the disease. The repercussion and the complexity that involves

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the relationship between urinary incontinence and sexual function reinforces the need to deepen the knowledge on the issue, since the experience of sexuality also influences the quality of life.<sup>5</sup>

Social stigma and embarrassment related to the condition make it difficult to seek care, resulting in underreporting of cases. The identification and diagnosis subsidize the adoption of appropriate interventions, as well as the establishment of measures that promote their prevention.<sup>2</sup>

Knowing the implications of urinary incontinence on lifestyle habits as well as the need for discussion on the sexuality theme in this context, this study proposes to analyze, according to the literature, the impacts of urinary incontinence on the sexual life of adults.

## METHOD

This is an integrative literature review operated through six steps: Survey of the problem and indication of the general objective; Search in databases of main studies; Application of inclusion and exclusion criteria; Selection of the most relevant studies, data evaluation and analysis of results; and Presentation of the research.

We sought to answer the research

question “What are the impacts of urinary incontinence on the sexual life of adults?”.

The search strategy was performed in the following electronic bibliographic databases: Medical Literature and Retrieval System onLine (MEDLINE/PubMed®); Latin American and Caribbean Literature on Health Sciences (LILACS); Specialized Bibliographic Database in Nursing (BDENF), via Virtual Health Library (VHL).

Only key terms were included, according to a pre-established PICO acronym (Population/ Intervention/ Comparison/ Results). In which the participants are sexually active adults. The exposure of interest is urinary incontinence. As for the comparator, it is noteworthy that the included studies did not have a

control group. The result to be investigated is sexuality.

Full texts were established as inclusion criteria, with a time frame from January 2015 to February 2021, in view of the importance of reviewing the most recent data, in Portuguese, English and Spanish. The following articles were excluded from the search for articles in this study: literature review works, monographs, dissertations, theses, letters to the editor, consensuses, editorials or studies in which it was not possible to identify a relationship with the theme and duplicates in the databases.

The search and selection of articles was carried out independently and carefully, in order to give greater rigor to this procedure. The selection of studies was initially performed by reading the titles

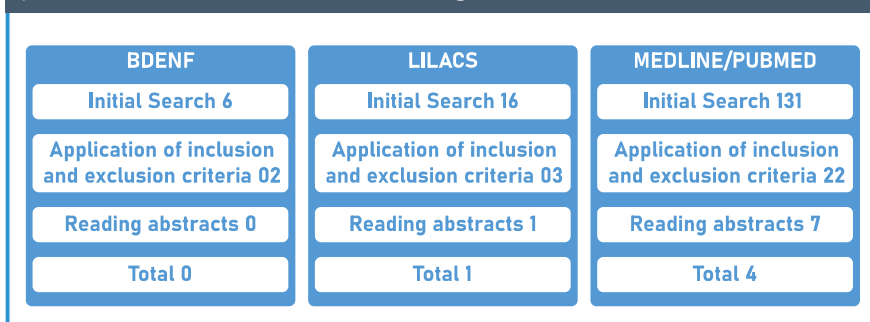
and abstracts. Based on the inclusion criteria, 26 articles remained. From this selection, the remaining articles were read in full, in order to include only publications relevant to the problem of this study, totaling 5 articles. Data analysis was performed descriptively.

## RESULTS

From the total of 155 identified articles, five studies were selected for analysis, after the elimination of duplicated articles in the databases or that met the exclusion criteria, according to the flowchart. Four (80%) articles were detected in the Medline/PUBmed database, 1 (20%) in LILACS (Figure 1).

As for the results of the studies, one (20%) made an association between quality of sexual life of women who underwent total hysterectomy with bilateral oophorectomy who suffered from Urinary Incontinence; one (20%) evaluated sexual activity in incontinent men with loss of erectile function after implantation of a device aimed at improving this condition. Of the 5 (100%) studies, three (60%) specifically assessed the feelings experienced by incontinent women and their relationship with quality of sexual life. The remaining two (40%) associated the fact that incontinence decreases sexual frequency and

Figure 01. Representative flowchart of the identification, screening, eligibility process and inclusion of articles in the integrative literature review. Picos, PI, 2021.



Source: Prepared by the author (2020).

Table 1 – Bibliographic characterization of the studies, regarding the author, year, journal, place of study, database, method, sample, age group of participants and results. Picos, PI, 2021.

N	AUTHOR, YEAR, LOCAL, DATABASE	METHOD, SAMPLE, AGE GROUP	RESULTS
1	Friedl A <sup>6</sup> . 2016. Itália. MEDLINE.	Prospective, non-randomized, single-center study. N=34 men (54,9-82,9)	Improved sexual activity, erectile dysfunction and absence of chronic pain in men with stress urinary incontinence after device implantation procedure (Adjustable Male Transobturator System).
2	Amesty MV <sup>7</sup> . 2015. Espanha. MEDLINE.	Retrospective Study. N = 7 women (19-39 years old)	Four of the women with epispadia associated with urinary incontinence reported a normal sex life with good self-control and adequate satisfaction. The others, despite reporting adequate sexual satisfaction, reported deficient knowledge and fear of rejection in relationships due to incontinence.
3	Grzybowski KA ME, WYDRA D <sup>8</sup> . 2018. Polônia. MEDLINE.	Cross-sectional study. N= 256 women (130 with Stress Urinary Incontinence (mean age: 52,8 years) and 126 controls (49,6 years))	It was observed that sexual frequency was impaired in women with Stress Urinary Incontinence. Of these, 62,31% had moderate or severe incontinence and had a lower quality of sexual frequency.

## artigo

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4	Gascón MRP <sup>9</sup> . 2018. Brasil. MEDLINE.	Descriptive cross-sectional study. N=31 participants. 10 men and 21 women (Mean age: 51,65 years) 18 of these with Urinary Incontinence	The prevalence of Urinary Incontinence was 58,06%. The main impact of the condition was on these patients' quality of life and sexuality. It is directly associated with difficulty in sexual practice due to the discomfort caused by urine loss, lack of interest and sexual desire.
5	Cruz SJV <sup>10</sup> . 2020. Brasil. LILACS	Quantitative and cross-sectional study N=162 women (68 were from the group that underwent total hysterectomy with bilateral oophorectomy (mean age: 40,33 years) and 94 constituted the control group (mean age: 33,7 years))	Among the participants it was noted that 42 (26%) of them had a prevalence of Stress Urinary Incontinence (SUI) and of these, 24 (54%) belonging to the Group that underwent total hysterectomy with bilateral oophorectomy, among them 35,3% had symptoms of SUI, concluding that the quality of sexuality was impaired.

Source: Prepared by the author (2020).

its quality, but they did not cling to the participants' feelings. Only two (40%) studied the relationship between incontinence and quality of sexual life in men (Table 1).

### DISCUSSION

Four of the analyzed studies showed that urinary incontinence, especially Stress Urinary Incontinence, had a negative impact on the sexuality of affected individuals. The only study that brings conflicting points with the others showed that 04 of the participants reported a normal sex life with good self-control and adequate sexual satisfaction.

Of the conditions associated with urinary incontinence that negatively impacted the sexuality of affected individuals, fear, decreased sexual quality and frequency, shame, stigma, embarrassment, for both sexes and erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation, were evidenced as being the main repercussions, besides having been made associations with depression, problems with self-image and loss of libido. The findings also showed that the condition of these people partially changed when they were submitted to surgery or went through some specific treatment.<sup>4,6</sup>

In males, radical prostatectomy is an important triggering factor for stress urinary incontinence. Fear of urine leakage during sexual intercourse is present in 44,4% three months after surgery and in 36,1% two years after, which affects the ability to maintain penile erection.<sup>11</sup>

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Thus, a prospective study evaluates Sexuality and erectile function after implantation of an Adjustable Male Transobturator System in patients with urinary incontinence due to prostatectomy and suggests that erectile function is significantly improved by decreasing urine loss resulting from device implantation.<sup>6</sup> Thus, it is observed that the effects of urinary incontinence in the experience of sexuality impact both the psychological and biological aspects of the affected individuals, requiring, therefore, a broad and resolute approach.

The research revealed that although urinary incontinence is still considered a taboo, the search for incontinence therapies has increased in recent years with a view to better quality of life, reintegration into social and sexual life and maintenance of body self-image.<sup>12</sup> The development of devices and therapies that provide the improvement of urinary incontinence points to a new configuration in the perception of the pathology by affected individuals, positively impacting their own self-image and, consequently, the way they experience their sexuality.

Urinary incontinence has been identified as an important finding in epispadia.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, with regard to sexuality, although the epispadias complex does not interfere with sexual interest, the presence of UI results in anxiety and avoidance of sexual activity.<sup>13</sup>

Considering the repercussions of urinary incontinence on the quality of life of affected individuals, it is seen that

they are closely related to the psychological field. Problems such as depression and anxiety are pointed out by the authors as consequences of UI due to shame, misunderstanding, personal demands and low sexual activity, leading to social and sexual isolation.<sup>14</sup>

The articles analyzed indicated that the sexual life of individuals is mainly compromised by the fear of urine loss during the sexual act, the lack of satisfaction and, with this, the loss of libido, interruption of the relationship due to voiding urgency and embarrassment.<sup>12,15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Among the most common feelings experienced by incontinent patients

**Thus, it is necessary to provide these people with support and information about prevention, treatment and rehabilitation care.**

were shame, embarrassment and discomfort, which culminated in a decrease in the frequency and quality of the sexual experience. Incontinence implies, in addition to the biological aspect, repercussions in areas such as sexuality. Thus, it is necessary to provide these people with support and information about prevention, treatment and rehabilitation care.

Among the limitations of this study, we can mention the small number of studies on the subject and the absence of studies dealing with nursing care in this context.

It is suggested for further studies and discussions on the topic and on how nursing care should be implemented in order to positively impact the quality of sexual life of affected patients. ■

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