

Re: 'Painful sex (dyspareunia) in women: prevalence and associated factors in a British population probability survey'

Sir,

We thank Matthes and Zucca-Matthes for their comments on our paper^{1,2} and agree with them that this is a neglected aspect of women's health that requires greater focus on clinical outcomes through robust research. The aim of our prevalence study was to outline the scale of the problem at a population level. The data come from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles; they are broad in scope and do not permit detailed investigation of clinical subgroups. Obtaining clinically sufficient information in the context of a population survey is rarely feasible due to small numbers in subgroups and the complexity of information required. In addition we cannot make the assumption that the deep and superficial dyspareunia framework correlates to different pathologies as the experience of painful sex is complex and is dependent on a variety of physical reasons (e.g. lubrication, menopausal state, skin disease) as well as psychosexual factors. Matthes and Zucca-Matthes suggest that we may have underestimated the prevalence of painful sex by including women who might be having sex exclusively without vaginal penetration. They suggest that disproportion between penis and vagina size may be relevant and that this may be true for selected subgroups of patients (e.g. post-hysterectomy or women receiving vaginal radiotherapy) where there is limited capacity and compromised function. However, for the majority of women without organic pathology, it remains unclear whether there is a correlation between penis size, vaginal capacity and overall experience. Having highlighted the problem in our paper, we would welcome clinical teams to support research focusing on defining and improving clinical outcomes for these women.

References

- 1 Matthes ACS, Zucca-Matthes G. Re: Painful sex (dyspareunia) in women: prevalence and associated factors in a British population probability survey. *Dyspareunia is a global public health problem!*. *BJOG* 2017;124:.
- 2 Mitchell KR, Geary R, Graham CA, Datta J, Wellings K, Sonnenberg P, et al. Painful sex (dyspareunia) in women: prevalence and associated factors in a British population probability survey. *BJOG*, January 2017; DOI: 10.1111/1471-0528.14518.

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