The lived experience of men with erectile dysfunction was reflected in the themes of *loss* and *being alone with it*


**QUESTION:** What are the issues facing men who live with erectile dysfunction (ED), particularly in their relationships with women partners and in their interactions with the wider community?

**Design**
Qualitative study.

**Setting**
United Kingdom.

**Participants**
A convenience sample of 9 men (age range 28–72 y) who were selected from new general practitioner (GP) referrals to a district general hospital and a specialist neurology clinic.

**Methods**
Men participated in semistructured indepth interviews that were audiotaped, transcribed, and analysed using an iterative process to generate categories and themes.

**Main findings**
2 main themes, *loss* and *being alone with it*, emerged. These 2 themes were connected via the meta-categories making sense of it, telling other people, and place of sex in the relationship.

**COMMENTARY**
This qualitative study by Pontin et al identifies and explores issues facing men who live with ED. Research that focuses on patients’ viewpoints, such as this study, helps providers to better understand how patient level of functioning affects quality of life, to design and evaluate treatment modalities, to develop care plans that address specific patient identified needs, and to make appropriate referrals when needed.

Pontin et al identified 2 limitations of their study. Firstly, the study explored only the men’s concerns, and it is likely that their partners may have different insights into the effects of ED on their relationship. Secondly, the study included only a small sample of men, and findings may differ for older or younger men, gay men, and men with different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Participants were men who sought treatment, but the reasons for seeking treatment were not clearly identified. The relation of the interview statements with the identified themes of loss and being alone with it were somewhat casually generalised in describing cause and effect.

A paucity of data exists on men’s needs related to ED including psychological, social, sexual, and patient care concerns.1 The study by Pontin et al identifies the need for further research on the effect of ED on manhood and fertility, the age and social background of men living with ED, decision making on treatment options, sources of information about treatment, relation between love and sex, and preferences related to treatment provider.

The findings emphasise the need to routinely include sexuality in community and hospital based nursing assessments. This requires a professional approach that offers respect for the individual and maintains confidentiality. Pontin et al stress the importance of making educational materials available to provide unbiased information about ED and its treatment to help patients make informed treatment choices.

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Evid Based Nurs 2003 6: 32
doi: 10.1136/ebn.6.1.32