

# Study looks at psychological solution for the problem of painful sex

October 13 2014, by Niki Widdowson

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A QUT psychology researcher is seeking couples who experience a sexual pain disorder that affects 12-17 per cent of couples attending sex therapy clinics, to trial a new therapy program.

Hilary Lindberg, who is conducting her doctoral research in clinical psychology at QUT's School of Psychology and Counselling, said she was looking for couples to volunteer to trial the therapeutic program she had developed combining [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) (CBT) with sensate-focus [therapy](#).

"Women who experience the disorder, female genital sexual pain, commonly report difficulty achieving [sexual intercourse](#), anxiety relating to sex or gynaecological examinations, and possibly pelvic floor muscle tightening during sex," Ms Lindberg said.

"The experience of female genital sexual pain is thought to have a psychological basis.

"Female genital sexual pain disorder is maintained by worry relating to the pain and is thought to develop in women who may have some general anxiety who found their first or subsequent sexual intercourse experiences painful.

"Symptoms include vaginal tightness causing discomfort, burning-like feelings or other pain resulting in penetration problems or complete inability to have sex."

Ms Lindberg said CBT had been found to be effective for treating many anxiety-based conditions and it had been successfully used by sex therapists to enable women with sexual pain disorders to have pain-free sex.

"While the focus of therapy has been to enable sex, the program I have developed and need volunteer couples to help me evaluate, takes this a step further to enable the couple to gain satisfaction from sex using sensate-focus therapy," she said.

"Sensate-focus therapy is commonly used in sex therapy clinics to help people increase intimacy and reduce sexual anxiety.

"The therapy program also provides a space where couples can talk about sex in their relationship."

Ms Lindberg said female sexual pain could extend to experiencing genital pain during visits to gynaecologists for pap smears and during tampon use.

"Obviously this can present health problems as well as relationship problems but the main results, if not treated, include dissatisfied relationships, lower self-esteem, and breakdown of relationships."

Ms Lindberg said she was offering 12 free sessions to couples who volunteered to take part in the program and evaluate the therapy program.

"My study needs heterosexual couples where the woman experiences pain during sex and who fear or avoid sexual activity."

**More information:** To take part in the confidential study, contact the QUT Psychology and Counselling Clinic and ask to speak with Hilary

Lindberg or email [hilary.lindberg@connect.qut.edu.au](mailto:hilary.lindberg@connect.qut.edu.au) for further details.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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