

# Genital pain in a daily relationship context: The role of attachment orientation.

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We will study the associations between pain-related (pain intensity, pain-related fear, behavioral coping with pain), sexual (sexual function, sexual activity, sexual satisfaction), and relational variables (relationship satisfaction) as measured in...

<b>Ethical review</b>	Approved WMO
<b>Status</b>	Recruiting
<b>Health condition type</b>	Sexual dysfunctions, disturbances and gender identity disorders
<b>Study type</b>	Observational non invasive

## Summary

### ID

NL-OMON56381

### Source

ToetsingOnline

### Brief title

Genital pain and attachment orientation.

### Condition

- Sexual dysfunctions, disturbances and gender identity disorders

### Synonym

Genital pain, pain during intercourse

### Research involving

Human

### Sponsors and support

**Primary sponsor:** Universiteit Maastricht

**Source(s) of monetary or material Support:** Ministerie van OC&W

## Intervention

**Keyword:** attachment orientation, diary study, genital pain, relationship

## Outcome measures

### Primary outcome

Daily diary items:

- Perceived partner responses and own responses to the partner, on daily level
- Actual and ideal (sexual) self-concept and discrepancies in self-concept, on daily level
- The intensity of genital pain, on daily level
- Attachment orientation via questionnaire

### Secondary outcome

Daily diary items:

- Intimate and sexual activities, on daily level
- Sexual fantasies/desires, on daily level
- Communication of the genital pain to the partner, on daily level
- Coping with pain (avoidance versus endurance), on daily level
- Sexual satisfaction, on daily level
- Relationship satisfaction, on daily level

## Study description

### Background summary

Genital pain during sexual activities is common among women. Although much research has been done on genital pain as an individual diagnosis, only few studies have focused on the impact of genital pain on the partner and vice versa. As a result, the underlying processes of genital pain in a relationship

context are largely unknown. Furthermore, it is unclear how genital pain unfolds in the daily context of the relationship. To understand the interpersonal dynamics of genital pain, it is relevant to rely on broader relationship theories. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) offers a coherent and well-validated heuristic framework to gain insight into the development, manifestation and impact of genital pain within a relationship. Until now, little research has focused on the role of attachment orientations of both the woman and her partner in the context of genital pain. A core idea of attachment theory is that early attachment experiences are stored in cognitive schemas that reflect one's perception of the self as being worthy of love and others as being available and trustworthy. In the context of an attachment relationship, both the self-concept and the belief that the partner will be available and responsive when needed (i.e., perceived partner responsiveness) are thus key components to understand how sexuality unfolds between partners, thereby gaining more insight into the development, manifestation and impact of genital pain within a relationship. Considering the self-concept and (perceived) partner responses as important targets of treatment, the results of this study may contribute to the improvement of current treatment of genital pain, such as integrating elements of EFT.

## **Study objective**

We will study the associations between pain-related (pain intensity, pain-related fear, behavioral coping with pain), sexual (sexual function, sexual activity, sexual satisfaction), and relational variables (relationship satisfaction) as measured in a daily context and examine the moderating role of both partners' attachment orientation. In addition, we will study the associations between these outcome variables and the daily self-concept (actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, discrepancy between actual and ideal self-concept), and (perceived) partner responses (both from the perspective of the woman and the partner). Again, we will explore whether and how these associations are moderated by attachment orientation.

## **Study design**

This is a prospective diary study that will be implemented in Maastricht University Medical Centre. The study will start with a baseline assessment. Next, we will investigate within-couple associations using a daily diary during three weeks. This study is dyadic in nature, because both women with genital pain as well their partners will participate in the study. Participants complete the daily diary at home, via an online application (Mema). The questionnaires will be applied via Qualtrics.

## **Study burden and risks**

Participants have to complete a baseline assessment (questionnaires) once (at

the start of the study) and a daily diary twice a day over the course of three weeks. The baseline assessment, takes less than 30 minutes. The daily diaries need to be completed in the morning and in the evening during 3 weeks. It takes 5-8 minutes to respond to the questions in the evening and 3-5 minutes for the morning questions. Based on previous research (by the research supervisor) using a similar design, we expect no risks or side effects for the participants. The only possible inconvenience could be discomfort when completing the questions about sexuality. However, given that the participants are couples facing sexual problems of which the majority will be seeking help, we expect that the topic of sexuality will be more familiar to them. The questionnaires/daily diary questions will collect information about relationship variables, self-concept, pain, sexual functioning and partner responsiveness in daily life. Although reporting on sexuality is a sensitive topic, previous research on this topic (also within a sample of women with genital pain) has indicated that participants do not consider this as offensive or violating their privacy. Furthermore, the participation is strictly voluntary. The current study will focus on couples in which the woman reports genital pain in order to gain more insight in genital pain in a relationship context. The results may contribute to the improvement of current treatments of genital pain, such as integrating elements of EFT.

## Contacts

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## Trial sites

### Listed location countries

Netherlands

## Eligibility criteria

### Age

Adults (18-64 years)

### Inclusion criteria

- Pain or fear of pain during intercourse/sexual activities which is reported by the woman as distressing, has lasted for at least 6 months and occurs on 75% of intercourse (attempts).
- Married or cohabiting with a male partner for at least six months.
- Partners will be together for at least five nights during daily diary period.
- Participants are mentally competent.

### Exclusion criteria

1) pregnancy; (2) major psychiatric illness (a major affective disorder, psychotic disorder, substance-related disorder or post traumatic-stress disorder related to genitals, e.g. as a sequel to sexual abuse, according to DSM-5 criteria (APA, 2013)); (3) vulvar pain not clearly linked to intercourse or pressure applied to the vestibule. The exclusion criteria for partners will be, a major psychiatric illness (a major affective disorder, psychotic disorder, substance-related disorder or post traumatic-stress disorder related to genitals, e.g. as a sequel to sexual abuse, according to DSM-5 criteria (APA, 2013)).

## Study design

### Design

**Study type:** Observational non invasive

Masking: Open (masking not used)

Control: Uncontrolled

Primary purpose: Other

### Recruitment

NL

Recruitment status: Recruiting

Start date (anticipated):	18-03-2022
Enrollment:	220
Type:	Actual

## Ethics review

Approved WMO	
Date:	01-11-2021
Application type:	First submission
Review commission:	METC academisch ziekenhuis Maastricht/Universiteit Maastricht, METC azM/UM (Maastricht)

## Study registrations

### Followed up by the following (possibly more current) registration

No registrations found.

### Other (possibly less up-to-date) registrations in this register

No registrations found.

### In other registers

Register	ID
CCMO	NL76520.068.21