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Perspective

# Psychosocial and Biological Factors in Sexual Disorders: A Research Overview

**Helena Viktor Sato-Mendes***

*Department of Sexual Health and Behavioral Medicine, Institute of Integrative Human Physiology, Lisbon, Portugal*

## DESCRIPTION

Sexual disorders represent a complex group of conditions influenced by both psychosocial and biological factors that interact in dynamic and often overlapping ways. These disorders include disturbances in sexual desire, arousal, orgasm, and pain during sexual activity in both males and females. Contemporary research increasingly emphasizes a biopsychosocial model, which recognizes that sexual function cannot be fully understood through biological mechanisms alone, but must also consider psychological wellbeing, interpersonal relationships, cultural influences, and environmental stressors.

Biological factors play a central role in sexual function and dysfunction. Hormonal regulation is one of the most important biological determinants, with testosterone, estrogen, progesterone, and prolactin influencing sexual desire, arousal, and satisfaction. In males, reduced testosterone levels are commonly associated with decreased libido and erectile dysfunction. In females, fluctuations in estrogen and progesterone levels across the menstrual cycle, pregnancy, and menopause significantly affect sexual responsiveness. Disruptions in endocrine balance can therefore contribute directly to sexual disorders.

Neurobiological mechanisms are equally important in regulating sexual behavior. The brain's reward system, involving dopamine pathways, is closely linked to sexual motivation and pleasure. Serotonin plays an inhibitory role, while oxytocin contributes to emotional bonding and sexual satisfaction. Imbalances in these neurotransmitters can lead to reduced sexual desire, delayed orgasm, or sexual aversion. Recent research has focused on pharmacological agents that modulate these neurochemical systems to improve sexual function.

Vascular health is another critical biological factor in sexual disorders, particularly in conditions such as erectile dysfunction. Proper blood flow is essential for physiological sexual response in both men and women. Endothelial dysfunction, often caused by diabetes, hypertension, smoking, and aging, impairs vascular dilation and reduces sexual performance. Studies have shown that sexual dysfunction may serve as an early indicator of systemic cardiovascular disease, highlighting its importance in clinical evaluation.

Genetic and epigenetic influences are increasingly being recognized in sexual health research. Genetic predispositions can affect hormone receptors, neurotransmitter function, and vascular regulation, all of which contribute to sexual function. Epigenetic changes, influenced by environmental exposures and lifestyle factors, can alter gene expression related to reproductive and sexual health. These findings suggest that sexual disorders may have long-term biological programming influenced by both inherited and external factors.

Psychosocial factors are equally significant in the development and persistence of sexual disorders. Psychological conditions such as anxiety, depression, and chronic stress are strongly associated with reduced sexual desire and performance. Emotional distress can disrupt neuroendocrine pathways and reduce hormonal balance, further compounding biological dysfunction. Cognitive factors, including negative body image, performance anxiety, and low self-esteem, also play a major role in sexual health.

Interpersonal relationships are another key psychosocial determinant. Relationship satisfaction, communication patterns, emotional intimacy, and trust significantly influence sexual wellbeing. Conflicts between partners, lack of emotional connection, and unresolved interpersonal issues often manifest as sexual dysfunction. Research shows that couples therapy and relationship counseling can significantly improve sexual outcomes by addressing these underlying issues.

Cultural and social influences also shape sexual attitudes and behaviors. Societal norms, religious beliefs, and cultural expectations can affect how individuals perceive sexuality and express sexual needs. In some cultures, stigma surrounding sexual health issues may prevent individuals from seeking help, leading to untreated or chronic conditions. Gender roles and expectations can further influence sexual behavior and contribute to disparities in sexual health experiences between men and women.

Trauma, particularly early-life sexual or emotional trauma, is a significant psychosocial risk factor for sexual disorders.

**Correspondence to:** Helena Viktor Sato-Mendes, Department of Sexual Health and Behavioral Medicine, Institute of Integrative Human Physiology, Lisbon, Portugal, Email id: helena.sato-mendes@iihp-sexualhealth.org

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Individuals with a history of trauma may experience long-term psychological effects such as post-traumatic stress, emotional avoidance, and fear of intimacy. These factors can significantly impair sexual function and satisfaction. Trauma-informed therapeutic approaches are increasingly being used in clinical practice to address these complex cases. The interaction between psychosocial and biological factors is central to understanding sexual disorders. For example, chronic stress can lead to hormonal imbalances such as elevated cortisol levels, which suppress sexual hormones and reduce libido. Similarly, depression can alter neurotransmitter activity while also affecting relationship dynamics and self-perception. This bidirectional interaction highlights the need for integrated treatment approaches.

Modern research emphasizes multidisciplinary management strategies that address both biological and psychosocial components of sexual disorders. Pharmacological treatments targeting hormonal and vascular pathways are often combined with psychological therapies such as cognitive behavioral therapy, sex therapy, and mindfulness-based interventions. This combined approach has shown improved outcomes compared to single-modality treatments.

## CONCLUSION

Sexual disorders arise from a complex interplay of psychosocial and biological factors that must be considered together for effective diagnosis and treatment. Advances in neuroscience, endocrinology, psychology, and social science have improved understanding of these conditions. A holistic, multidisciplinary approach is essential for improving sexual health outcomes and overall quality of life. Digital health technologies are also contributing to improved understanding and management of sexual disorders. Telemedicine platforms provide confidential access to healthcare providers, reducing stigma and improving treatment-seeking behavior. Mobile applications allow individuals to track symptoms, mood patterns, and sexual activity, enabling more personalized interventions. Despite significant advancements, challenges remain in fully understanding and treating sexual disorders. The complexity of interactions between biological and psychosocial factors makes diagnosis and treatment difficult. Social stigma, lack of awareness, and limited access to specialized care further complicate management.