

Abstract

Background: Having a disability may have a negative impact on a person's experience of sexuality and intimacy (Esmail et al., 2007) and the topic is often excluded in the day to day practice of occupational therapy (Hattjar, Parker, & Lappa, 2008). When sexuality and intimacy are not addressed in rehabilitation, clients with disabilities potentially experience decreased quality of life and overall well-being (Eglseder, Webb, & Rennie, 2018). The Sexual Assessment Framework (McBride & Rines, 2000) serves as a comprehensive guide to understanding the complex nature of sexuality and intimacy for individuals with disabilities.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore the experience of intimacy and sexuality of couples following the onset of a disabling injury, using the SAF as a theoretical guide to inquiry.

Design: A qualitative phenomenological approach using in-depth semi-structured interviews was used to explore the occupational nature of sexuality and intimacy for two heterosexual couples in which the male partner had sustained a spinal cord injury or bilateral above the knee amputation.

Findings: The occupational nature of sexuality and intimacy for the participants was revealed through the themes of sexual knowledge, sexual self-view, sexual interest, sexual response, sexual activity, sexual behavior, and sexual health and family planning.

Conclusion: The SAF provided an effective format from which to explore the occupational nature of sexuality. Occupational therapists have the skills to address occupational deficits in sexual knowledge, sexual self-view, sexual interest, sexual response, sexual activity, sexual behavior, sexual health, and family planning.

Keywords: sexuality, intimacy, disability, occupational therapy