

# HPV infection and psychosexual outcome

Alessandra Graziottin, MD  
Director, Center of Gynaecology and Medical Sexology  
H. San Raffaele Resnati, Milan, Italy

## Introduction

Genital Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection is the most commonly occurring sexually transmitted viral infection in humans. It is highly prevalent and increasing, due to promiscuity and unprotected sex. HPV is a wide family of DNA viruses, which may cause benign skin and mucosal tumours (genital, anal or oral warts), intraepithelial neoplasias and/or malignant cancers in different organs. Women are more susceptible to the oncogenic effect of HPVs, mostly at the genital site, on the uterine cervix. HPVs attack the organs more involved in love, sex and intimacy. Unfortunately, the clinical attitude is to focus on the medical consequences, with a consistent neglect of the psychosexual outcomes.

## Aims

To review the impact on women's sexuality of: a) genital warts and their treatment; b) HPV related genital, oral and anal precancerous and cancerous lesions.

## Methods

Medline search was carried out, looking for HPV, genital warts, intraepithelial neoplasia, cervical cancer, anal cancer, oral cancer, epidemiology, HPV risk factors, sexual dysfunctions, desire disorders, arousal disorders, dyspareunia, vulvar vestibulitis, vulvodynia, orgasmic difficulties, sexual repertoire, couple sexual problems, depression, anxiety, pap-smear, screening program, therapy, vaccines, HPV and pregnancy.

## Results

Psychosexual vulnerability increases with number of recurrences of HPV infections. Depression, anxiety and anger are the emotions most frequently reported. HPV infection and treatment may affect sexual desire, reduce genital arousal, affect the orgasmic potential and be associated with coital pain. However, no specific correlation has been proved so far between HPV infection and a specific female sexual disorder. The relationship between HPV and vulvar vestibulitis related dyspareunia remains controversial. Counselling problems, the risks of anal and oral sex, risks of HPV in pregnancy, and the concept of high-risk partner are discussed. A practical approach is privileged, to offer to clinicians clinically relevant tips, useful in their daily practice, when dealing with HPV infected women and couples.

## Conclusion

The evidence of psychosexual consequences of HPV related genital warts and intraepithelial lesions is growing. Clinicians should consider the psychosexual outcome as a critical part of HPV infection in women.