Low satisfaction with sex life among people with severe mental illness living in a community

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Background/Objectives
Research on sex lives of people with severe mental illness (SMI) most often focuses on dysfunction and the side-effects of medication. We wished to determine how people with SMI experience sex and assess satisfaction with it in a broader evaluation of quality of life.

Methods
Data was gathered using mixed methods, including a reliable psychometric quality of life instrument and in-depth interviews.

Results Sex life showed the lowest rating of all quality of life domains, with men indicating lower satisfaction with sexual life than women. Low satisfaction also correlated with lower scores on the total quality of life index. Sex life for people with SMI was seen to be of secondary importance.

Discussion/Conclusion
The area of sex showed the lowest experienced satisfaction rating of all measured domains of quality of life. Our interview-based study verified that intimate relationships and sexual experiences are considered unattainable among those suffering from SMI. Programs to increase the possibility sustaining a sex life might need to be added to existing recommendations for people with SMI living in a community.