

# Lingering Taboos: Sex/Sexuality, Symptoms & Recovery in Early Psychosis



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## INTRODUCTION

The intersection of early psychosis with sexuality is an important but neglected area of early intervention scholarship.



## OBJECTIVE

Better understand young people's struggles with sexual identity and relationships, sex-related symptom content, and past or current adverse sexual experiences.

## METHODS

The project was developed and analyzed by persons with personal experience of psychosis.

We conducted:

- 80 individual client interviews
- 2 client focus groups (24 clients total)

Transcripts were coded for themes related to sex/gender, sexuality, and sexual experience.

## RESULTS

Analysis revealed:

- adverse sexual experiences frequently implicated in the development of psychotic symptoms;
- high frequency of negative and neutral sexual symptom content (almost half of participants);
- active concerns about psychosis and the potential for future romantic relationships.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Clients' sexual experiences are clinically relevant and often centrally important to clients themselves.
- Our analyses underscore the importance of more fully addressing these experiences within EIP services and suggest potential starting points for intervention development and refinement.

## Select Themes & Quotations

### Sexual Abuse

*"The voices that I heard was bad ones for the most part. I came from an abusive background, meaning that my family was abusive physically, emotionally and sexually. I was raped and I just heard all these voices."*

### Negative Experiences of Sexual Possession

*"Around four years ago ... started hearing voices in my head in the form of a demon, like it was possessing half my body. This came after a very vivid dream in which I was raped and tortured by demons—very, very vivid dream."*

### Positive or Neutral Erotic Hallucinations

*"My first hallucination, there was this girl that I liked since high school, who had been dating my best friend at the time. She came over to the house. We're all sitting around, playing Scrabble. I felt her start to play footsie with me, underneath the table. Here's this beautiful girl, maybe the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. Even when my friend was dating here, I'd been secretly admiring her in secret. She started playing footsie with me."*

**Table 1. Abuse Categories (N=80)**

Category	n	%
Past Abuse of Any Kind	26	33%
Past Sexual Abuse	17	21%

**Table 2. Symptom Content (N=80)**

Category	n	%
Voices Issuing Sexual Commands	12	15%
Teasing, Harassing Voices About Sexuality, Taboos or Sexual Orientation	7	9%
Teasing, Harassing Voices Saying Negative Things About Masturbation or Sexual Thoughts	18	23%
Negative Experiences of Sexual Possession	13	16%
Positive or Neutral Erotic Hallucinations	8	10%
<b>Sexual Content of Any Kind</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>43%</b>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT

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