



# Psychology's Role in Supporting Sexual Wellness of those with a Chronic Disease

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## Background

Intimacy is an often-overlooked aspect of wellness and involves both physical and mental wellbeing.



Clinician-scientists, such as psychologists, can play a vital role in supporting the intimacy and sexual wellness of those whose intimacy is impacted by a chronic disease diagnosis.

Scleroderma (SSc), for example is a rare, chronic, autoimmune disease affecting the physical, mental, and sexual wellbeing of those diagnosed.

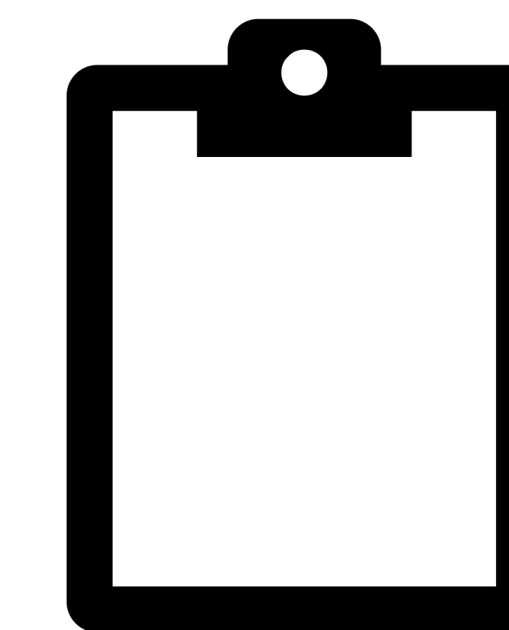
## Aims

(1) To share the role that psychologists can have in furthering research and supporting the overall sexual wellness of individuals, particularly those with chronic illness.

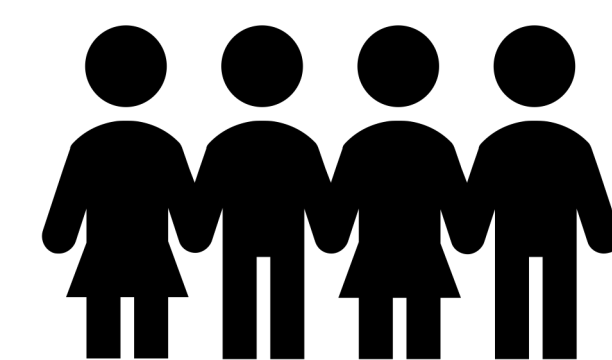
(2) To review and synthesize the available literature on sexual concerns among those with SSc and determine if this may be a topic that can be addressed through an existing webinar toolkit being developed and delivered by a collaborative team of patient partners, psychologists, rheumatologists, researchers, and patient organizations.

## Methods

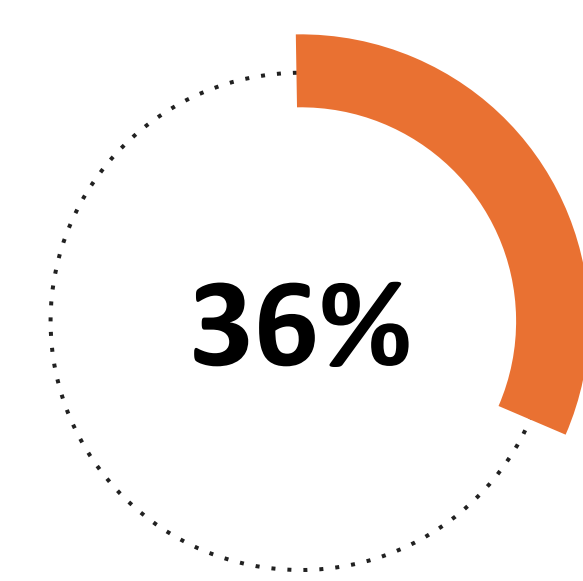
A literature review of SSc and its impact on intimacy was conducted, supplemented by a cross-sectional self-report survey completed by individuals diagnosed with SSc.



## Results

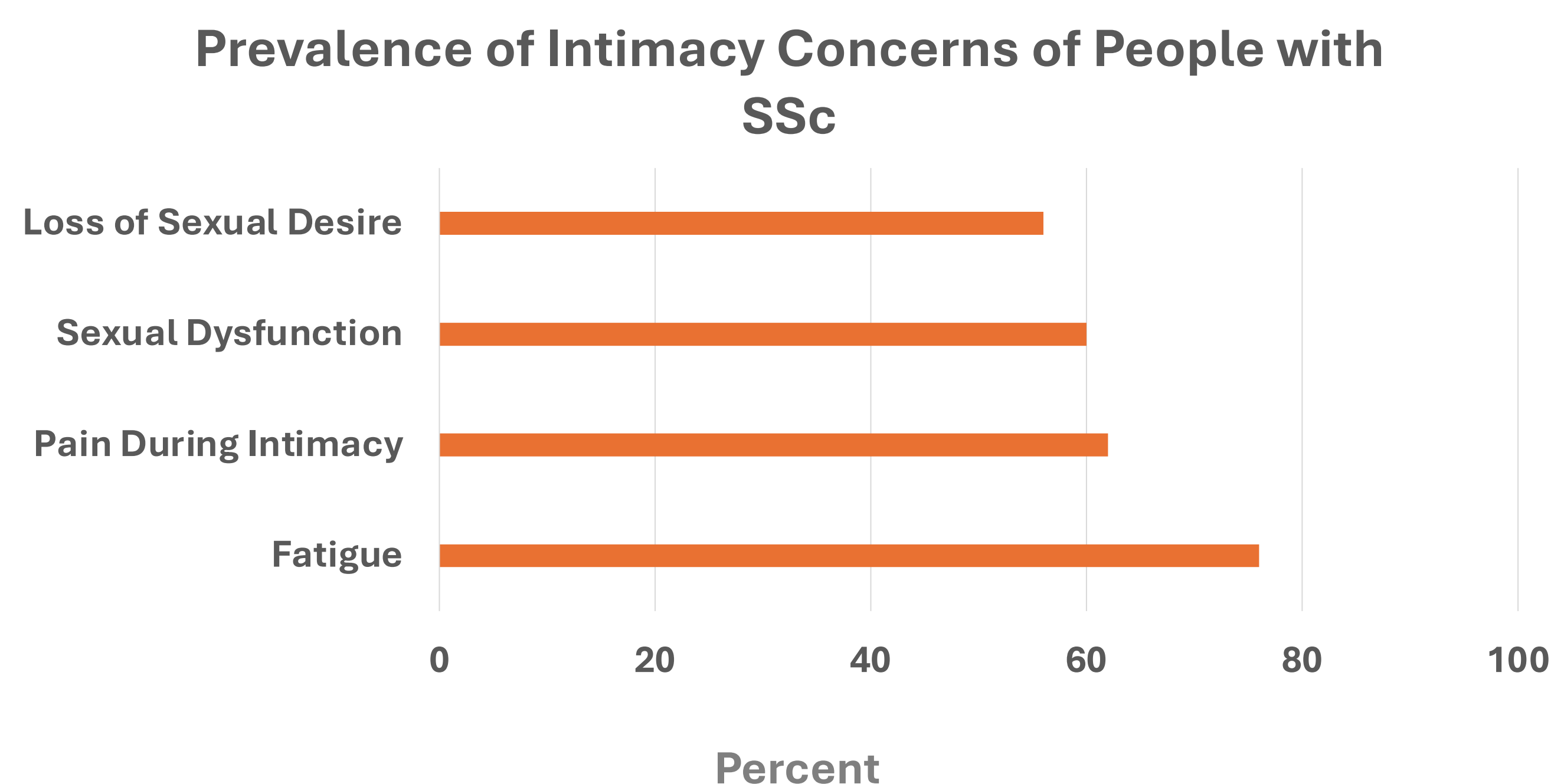


Eighty-two Canadians living with SSc completed the self report survey.



36% expressed interest in attending a webinar to support concerns with intimacy.

The literature review resulted in 15 relevant papers. These papers outlined common issues faced by this population, including:



Findings indicated that more than half of women with SSc experience significantly fewer and less intense orgasms than women without SSc.

Recommendations to address concerns with intimacy include;

- Shifting negative thinking patterns around intimacy
- Facilitating open communication with one's partner regarding intimacy concerns
- Improving self-esteem and body image
- Physical aids to address pain
- Camouflaging areas of the body that result in discomfort due to SSc
- The support of one's partner and care team

## Conclusions

Resources to support intimacy concerns have highlighted the importance of addressing challenges through a bio-psychosocial approach.

Approximately a third of individuals surveyed would be open to receiving support through a webinar. Alternatively, mental health professionals could be members of patient's multidisciplinary care team to support topics such as intimacy-related concerns.

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