

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceptions of women suffering from vaginismus regarding their condition, themselves and their significant relationships. The subjective world of women suffering from vaginismus was therefore focused upon, within the context of a qualitative paradigm.

Four volunteers who were diagnosed with the condition by a sexologist at the DISA health clinic, and were at the time seeking treatment for the condition, participated in the research. The research was conducted in the form of a semi-structured interview. Various psychological, emotional and social themes were explored. The participants' responses were recorded and then analysed utilising content analysis.

Within the analysis, a lack of constancy was noted amongst the participants. Differences with regard to etiological themes, personality profiles, emotions as well as relationships with intimate partners and parents were found. This is coherent with findings in the literature, which are also inconsistent. However, it should be noted that that whilst few aspects were found to be universal, most shared some commonality. Thus, various trends were established.

The experience of vaginismus appears to be stressful, impacting on one's emotions, self-esteem and intimate relationships. Trends were identified with regard to choice of partner. However, different relationship dynamics were found suggesting that couples react differently to the experience of vaginismus. All of the participants gave vague descriptions of their parental figures and relationships. Thus, it is difficult to make assertions regarding these relationships.

Patterns of interaction and behaviour were experienced during the interviews. Avoidance of emotion was prevalent. The tendency to idealise relationships was found with all of the participants. The participants also appeared to make contradictory statements throughout the interviews.