

Public Abstract

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Title:STIGMA AND SEXUALITY: HOW BURN SURVIVORS AND RELATIONAL PARTNERS MANAGE THEIR EXPERIENCES

Burn survivors and their injuries are studied exhaustively while in the context of the hospital; however what happens after they leave and interact with others is under-researched. Despite the expansive amount of research in the areas of stigma communication, sexuality, and burn survivor, scholars have yet to examine the stigma and sexuality experiences of survivors and relational partners. Through hermeneutic phenomenology, this study explores the stigma management and sexuality experiences of both survivors and relational partners. Interviews were conducted with 19 survivors and 8 relational partners across the United States. Results indicated that survivors managed stigma using the following four strategy patterns: Accepters, Situational Adopters, Challengers, and Dissembling Challengers. Relational partners a different pattern to manage stigma. While stigma seemed to be constructed separately by survivors and partners, sexuality was more clearly co-constructed. Sexuality of the survivor was co-constructed as: feeling not sexy, being fragile, being a new normal, and not being impacted. Implications for addition of the interpersonal context to the Stigma Management Communication model, patterns of stigma strategies, practical applications, and future research are presented.