

9. PENILE SIZE ABNORMALITIES AND DYSMORPHOPHOBIA

9.1 Definition, epidemiology and classification

9.1.1 History

Throughout history, the size of the penis has symbolised a marker of masculinity [1159] and has created intense debate in societies with different social and cultural implications [1160]. Indeed, along with the capacity for vaginal penetration, the penis is linked to an ancestral sense of men's fertility and sexual performance, making the size of the penis a source of distinguishing male identity [1161, 1162]. Evidence of male supremacy and dominance as represented by phallic designs can be found across cultures and history and is still currently supported by contemporary media, including the pornographic industry [1163, 1164].

Overall, cosmetic surgery has the potential to restore self-esteem, reduce anxiety, social phobia and depressive mood states regarding body concerns, increasing individuals' well-being and quality of life (QoL) [1165, 1166]. Yet, some candidates for cosmetic surgery may have psychopathological conditions and surgery may result in negative outcomes [1166, 1167].

In the real-life setting, it is interesting to note that 84% women report being satisfied with their male partners' penile size whereas 55% of the male partners were satisfied with their penile size and 45% of them report that they would like to have a larger penis [1168]. In this context, men with a high level of social-desirability were more likely than others to self-report having a larger penis [1169]. A recent study also demonstrated that reducing the depth of penetration led to a statistically significant 18% reduction of overall sexual pleasure with an average 15% reduction in length of the penis [1170].

Additionally, the subjective impression of penile size may have a negative effect on sexual functioning and QoL, impacting sexual life in about 10% of men [1171-1173]. This prevalence sharply rises in patients seeking penile augmentation procedures [1174, 1175].

Furthermore, the fact that a subgroup of men does not achieve reasonable levels of satisfaction and emotional adjustment after penile augmentation procedures, underlines that with certain psychopathological conditions men will not benefit from such invasive procedures [1176]. These men may represent a psychologically vulnerable group of individuals in whom penile augmentation procedures will have negative effects and, as such, require clinical and psychological support. Clinicians should be adept to anticipate and address such vulnerability through a tailored psychological evaluation and further consider cultural standards enabling an understanding of patient expectations [1177].

With the increased use of penile augmentation procedures worldwide, either medical or surgical, it becomes crucial to create evidence-based recommendations to guide clinicians in this challenging and controversial area.

9.1.2 Definition

To date short penis condition represents both a diagnostic and treatment challenge [1178, 1179]. An accurate measurement of the penile shaft is a mandatory step in the assessment of patients complaining of a short penis and defining the norm [1180]. Indeed, a standard tool to address penile measurements and to counsel patients seeking penile augmentation procedures is needed. To date, the standard penile size has yet to be clearly defined. Even though several investigators have attempted to provide objective measurements to define a normal penile size, there is still no consensus on this (Table S9.1 online supplementary evidence Appendix 5).

The other factor that strongly affects penile measurements is the interobserver variability and the underestimation of the stretched penile length (SPL) when compared to the erect state [1181].

Despite the aforementioned limitations, SPL, defined as the distance between the pubic symphysis and the apex of the glans, represents the most overlapping measurement of the erect penis. Accordingly, a SPL of less than 2.5 standard deviations (SD) below the mean for the male's age and race is considered as micropenis [1182, 1183].