

Female Genital Image as a Component of Sexual Health: Genital Self-Image and Sexual Distress Among Women Living in Puerto Rico

Yesenia Fuentes MD, Manuel Pastrana MD, Gabriela Roldan MS-2, Lorena Gonzalez-Sepulveda MS, Erika Benabe MD FACOG
Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, San Juan City Hospital

INTRODUCTION

- Reports of genital perception unconformity within women attending gynecologist clinics have been increasing (1).
- Psychosocial and sexual health are important aspects for genital self-image (2).
- Discomfort with the appearance of genitals can present as sexual distress.
- Sexual function measures in relation to genital self-image (GSF) on Hispanics is practically nonexistent (3).

OBJECTIVE

- This project aims to bring attention to the relation of GSF with sexual distress on ethnic minorities.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

- The Female Genital Self-Image (FGSI) Scale and the Female Sexual Distress-Scale Revised (FSDS-R) were administered to females, aged 21-65 years old, and living in Puerto Rico between June 2018 and June 2020.
- From 274 participants in the study, we included only the ones that completed both questionnaires (n=114).
- Descriptive statistics were used to summarize our data.
- The association between FGSI and female sexual distress (FSD) was assessed using: (1) Mann-Whitney test and logistic regression (FSD as binary outcome), and (2) Pearson's correlation and robust linear regression (FSD as continuous outcome)
- A FSDS-R score ≥ 11 was used to indicate presence of FSD.

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographics (n = 114)

Characteristic	n (%)
Age (in years)	
21-31	52 (45.6)
32-42	37 (32.5)
43-53	17 (14.9)
54-65	8 (7.0)
Living Area	
Rural	24 (21.1)
Urban	89 (78.1)
Unknown	1 (0.9)
Race/Ethnicity	
Non-Hispanic White	3 (2.6)
Hispanic	110 (96.5)
Unknown	1 (0.9)

Table 2. Distribution of Female Genitalia Self-Image (FGSI) (n = 114)

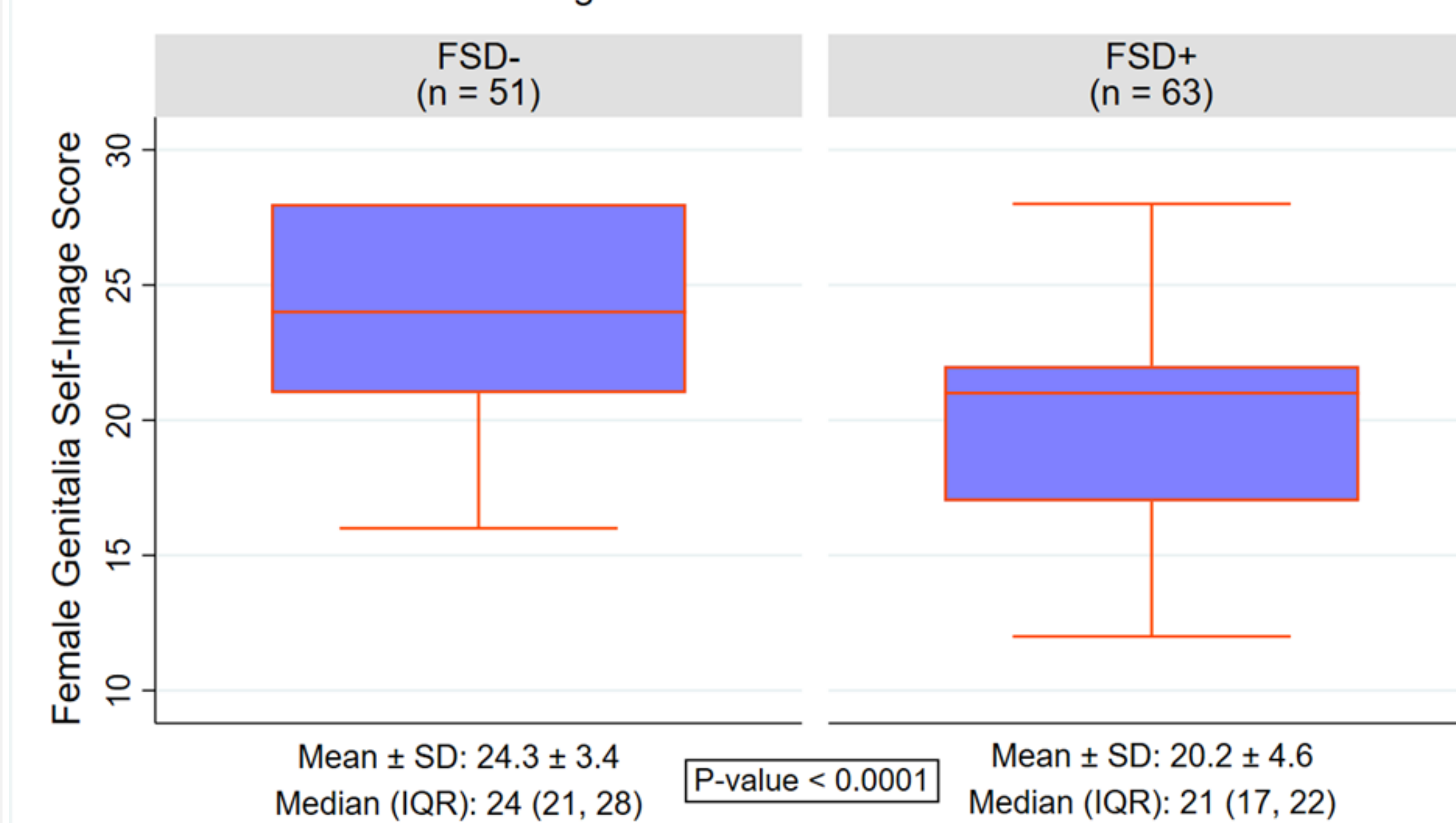
Items	Mean \pm SD	Strongly Agree/ Agree n (%)
I feel positively about my genitals	3.1 \pm 0.9	87 (76.3)
I am satisfied with the appearance of my genitals	3.1 \pm 0.9	85 (74.6)
I would feel comfortable letting a sexual partner look at my genitals	3.2 \pm 0.8	93 (81.6)
I am satisfied with the size of my genitals	3.1 \pm 0.9	89 (78.1)
I think my genitals work the way they are supposed to work	3.3 \pm 0.8	98 (86.0)
I feel comfortable letting a healthcare provider examine my genitals	3.1 \pm 0.7	96 (84.2)
I am not embarrassed about my genitals	3.1 \pm 0.9	91 (79.8)
FGSI Total Score	22.0 \pm 4.6	

Table 3. Distribution of Female Sexual Distress (FSD) (n = 114)

Item	Mean \pm SD	Frequently/Always
Distress about your sex life	1.5 \pm 1.2	24 (21.1)
Unhappy about your sexual relationship	1.4 \pm 1.1	20 (17.5)
Guilty about sexual difficulties	1.2 \pm 1.2	16 (14.0)
Frustrated by your sexual problems	1.3 \pm 1.2	19 (16.7)
Stressed about sex	1.2 \pm 1.1	16 (14.0)
Inferior because of sexual problems	0.9 \pm 1.1	14 (12.3)
Worried about sex	1.3 \pm 1.2	16 (14.0)
Sexually inadequate	1.0 \pm 1.0	10 (8.8)
Regrets about your sexuality	0.3 \pm 0.7	2 (1.8)
Embarrassed about sexual problems	0.7 \pm 1.0	8 (7.0)
Dissatisfied with your sex life	1.4 \pm 1.2	24 (21.0)
Angry about your sex life	0.9 \pm 1.1	11 (9.6)
Bothered by low sexual desire	0.9 \pm 1.1	13 (11.4)
FSD Total Score	14.0 \pm 11.5	

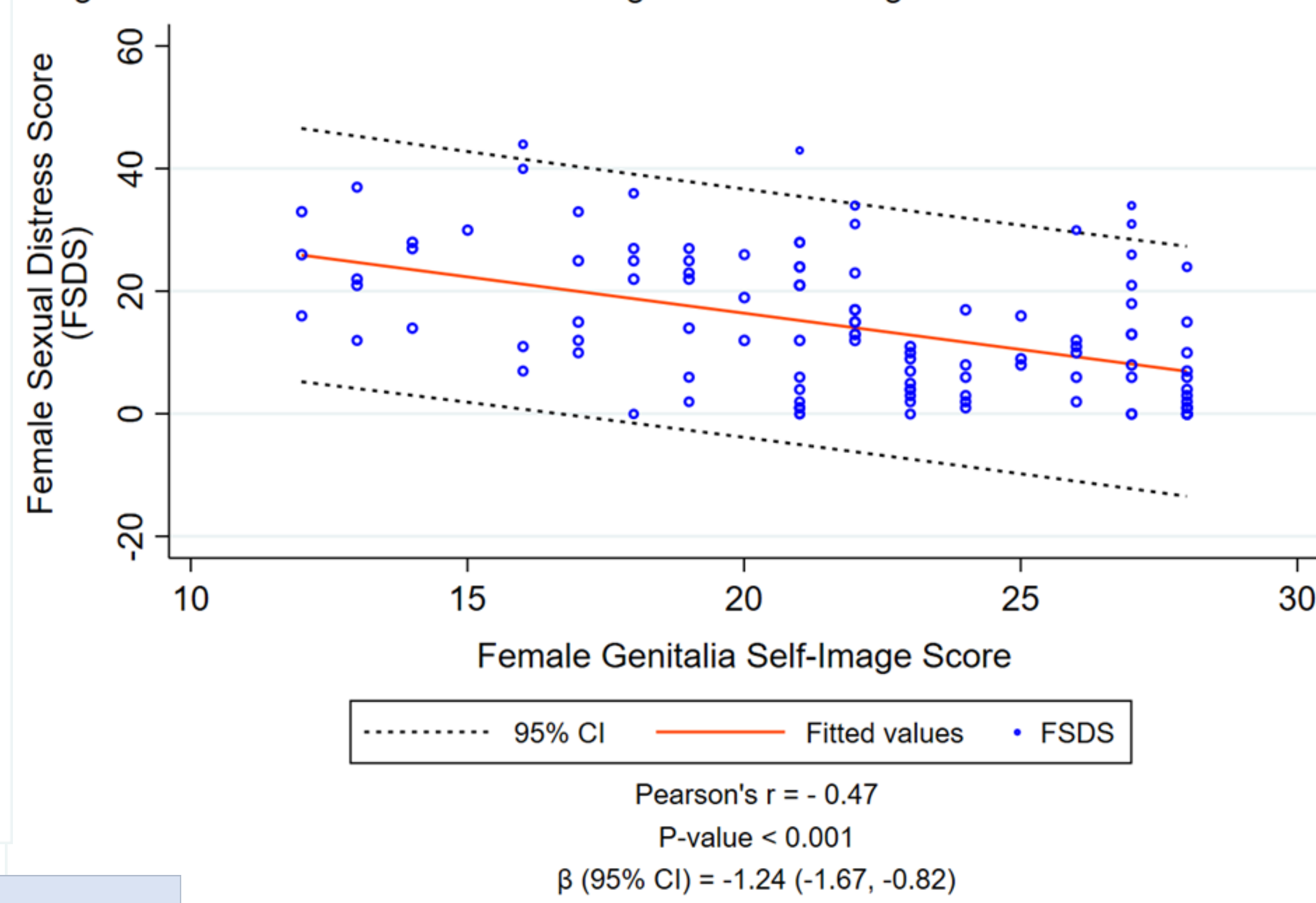
Note: About 55.3% of women showed sexual distress (FSD Score ≥ 11).

Figure 1. Distribution of female genitalia self-image scores according to female sexual distress status



Note: The odds for sexual distress are 0.78 (95% CI: 0.70, 0.87) times lower with each one unit increase in the female genitalia self-image score. Graphs by Female Sexual Distress (positive = score ≥ 11 / negative = score < 11)

Figure 2. Association between female genitalia self-image and female sexual distress



KEY FINDINGS

- We found that 45.6% of women were between 21-31 years old and 96.5% of them were Hispanics (Table 1).
- The mean total score of the FGSI and FSDS-R was 22.0 \pm 4.6 and 14.0 \pm 11.5, respectively (Table 2).
- About 74.6% reported satisfaction with their genital appearance and 55.3% showed FSD (Table 3).
- Those with FSD were more likely to present lower median FGSI scores than those without FSD (21 vs. 24; p<0.001).
- The odds for sexual distress were 0.78 (95% CI: 0.70, 0.87) times lower with each one-unit increase in FGSI score (Figure 1).
- Pearson's correlation showed a weak negative linear correlation between FGSI and FSD ($r = -0.47$, p<0.001) (Figure 2).

CONCLUSION

- An inverse relationship between FGSI and FSD was observed in our study.
- Women with a higher GSI have a lower sexual distress
- Genital self-image might play a role in overall sexual experience including sexual distress.
- FSDS-R could be used as a screening tool to identify FSD in women who present to primary care providers with concerns about their sexuality.
- Further studies are needed on ethnic minority populations to assess these variables and identify tools for optimization of management in women with low GSI and high levels of FSD.

RESOURCES

1. Goodman MP, Placik OJ, Matlock DL, Simopoulos AF, Dalton TA, Veale D, Hardwick-Smith S. Evaluation of Body Image and Sexual Satisfaction in Women Undergoing Female Genital Plastic/Cosmetic Surgery. *Aesthet Surg J*. 2016 Oct;36(9):1048-57. doi: 10.1093/asj/sjw061. Epub 2016 Apr 15. PMID: 27084062.
2. Rowen TS, Gaither TW, Shindel AW, Breyer BN. Characteristics of Genital Dissatisfaction Among a Nationally Representative Sample of U.S. Women. *J Sex Med*. 2018 May;15(5):698-704. doi: 10.1016/j.jsxm.2018.03.004. PMID: 29699755.
3. Benuto, L., 2013. *Guide To Psychological Assessment With Hispanics*. Boston, MA: Springer US, pp.183-196