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Psychological Outcomes of Penile Augmentation

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Background

An increasing number of men are seeking surgery to enhance the size of their penis, but the safety and efficacy of this surgery have not been established.¹ As a result, penile lengthening and girth enhancement surgery are still considered to be “experimental”.² Penile enhancement using injectable fillers rather than invasive surgery may represent a safe and effective method to increase penis size.³ In this study, we employ a method of penile girth augmentation using injectable hyaluronic acid (HA) as the filler (Figure 1).³ Despite the popularity of these procedures, very little is known about the factors that motivate men to undergo penile augmentation, as well as the psychological impacts after the procedure. The current study aimed to examine men’s motivations for penile girth augmentation and the effects this procedure has on their psychological well-being and sexual relationships.

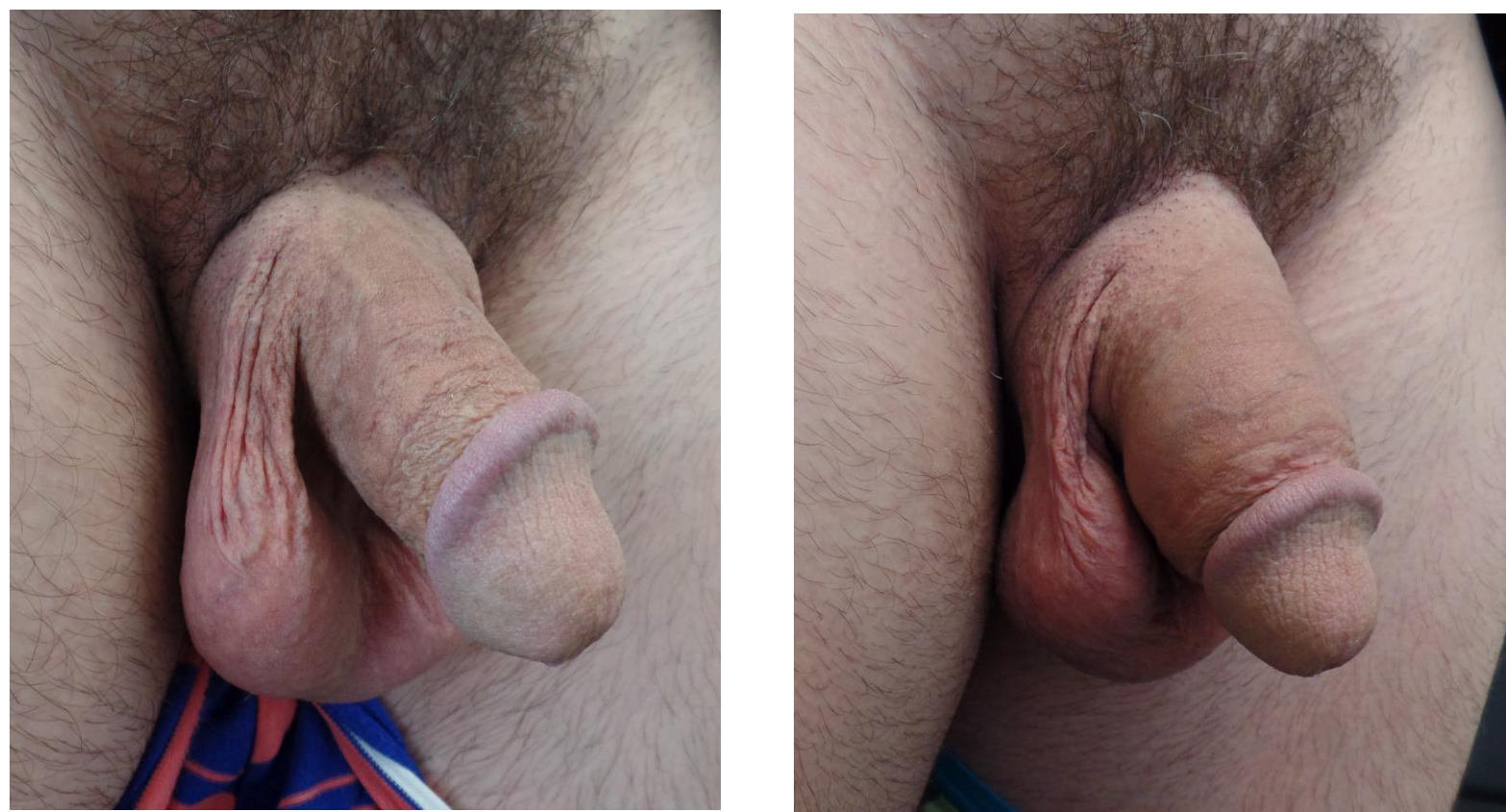


Figure 1. (A) Pre-injection photograph of a 47-year-old man who was concerned about his “thin” penis, which measured 9.5 cm in girth. This measurement was within the normal girth size range (8.5 to 10.5cm).⁴ (B) Post-injection photograph obtained 1 month after 15 mL injection of a HA-based gel to enhance penile girth, now measuring 13.0 cm. Source: Oates & Sharp (2017)³

Methods

The study employed a retrospective design. Participants were 25 Australian men, aged 23 to 69 years ($M = 39.6$, $SD = 13.7$), who had undergone an injectable penile girth augmentation procedure from 1-12 months prior ($M = 6.6$, $SD = 3.9$) at Perth or Sydney Academy Laser Clinics. These men completed an online questionnaire which contained measures of procedure motivation and satisfaction, as well as genital self-image,⁵ penile dysmorphic disorder symptoms,⁶ and self-esteem and sexual relationship satisfaction.⁷ The participants were asked to rate their genital self-image, penile dysmorphic disorder symptoms, and self-esteem and sexual relationship satisfaction before their procedure and at the time of completing the questionnaire to examine any perceived changes in these psychological outcomes.

Results

The participants were motivated by a variety of reasons to undergo penile girth augmentation, with the most common involving a desire to improve their self-perception (Table 1). The majority of men were satisfied with the size ($n = 20$, 80.0%), appearance ($n = 19$, 76.0%), and function ($n = 19$, 76.0%) of their penis after augmentation. Two participants (8.0%) reported post-procedure complications which included infection, swelling and pooling of filler. The men reported statistically significant improvements at the time of completing the questionnaire compared to their recalled levels prior to the procedure in their genital self-image, penile dysmorphic disorder symptoms, and self-esteem (Table 2). The improvement in their self-confidence was approaching statistical significance, but there were no significant changes for any of the relationship measures.

Results

Table 1
Participant Motivations for Penile Girth Augmentation by Theme ($n = 25$)

Theme	Example	n (%)	n (%) as sole reason
Self-Perception	“Just wanted more size to feel better about myself.” “To feel more confidence in myself.”	8 (32.0)	4 (16.0)
Psychological Distress	“Primarily have always been conscious of my size” “I knew that I lacked girth for many years. From girls telling me, and seeing for myself. I just wanted to feel normal and not ashamed or anxious of it. It was occupying about 80% of my thoughts that I was inadequate, and useless.”	7 (28.0)	6 (24.0)
Sexual Function	“I wanted to make my partner feel very full and very stretched.” “So it...feels tighter when having sex.”	7 (28.0)	2 (8.0)
Appearance	“So it looks bigger.” “It’s always nice to feel you fill out a pair of undies or swimmers better.”	6 (24.0)	1 (4.0)
Combination	“Partner has had multiple children so trying to increase her pleasure along with mine. Not quite satisfied with natural size. Increase confidence, self-image and pleasure.” “Self-esteem. Feeling comfortable in public change rooms.”	7 (28.0)	-

Table 2
Comparisons of Participant Recalled Ratings before Penile Girth Augmentation and Current Ratings on Psychological Outcome Measures ($n = 25$)

Measure	Range	Before M (SD)	Current M (SD)	p -value	Cohen’s d
Genital Self-Image	7-28	17.7 (4.7)	21.9 (4.0)	<.001	0.96
Penile Dysmorphic Disorder	0-72	21.9 (14.7)	11.9 (11.1)	.002	0.77
Self-Esteem and Relationship	0-100	69.8 (21.7)	78.0 (18.0)	.091	0.41
Sexual Relationship	0-100	71.1 (22.2)	76.8 (18.2)	.240	0.28
Confidence	0-100	68.1 (24.1)	79.5 (19.5)	.065	0.52
Self-Esteem	0-100	67.5 (25.9)	80.6 (17.9)	.008	0.59
Overall Relationship	0-100	71.9 (22.7)	72.9 (28.6)	.809	0.04

Conclusion

Men undergo penile augmentation for a range of psychological and sexual reasons, and appear to be satisfied with the results. They also seem to experience improvement in their attitude towards their penis, and a reduction in psychological distress surrounding their penis. These improvements appear to be accompanied by an increase in overall self-esteem, but there is no impact on sexual relationship satisfaction. However, as this was a retrospective study design, prospective controlled studies are required to better clarify the outcomes of penile augmentation. Nevertheless, these new insights into the psychological underpinnings of penile augmentation may assist clinicians in discussions with men experiencing penile size concerns who are considering augmentation.

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