Patients diagnosed with genital warts endure significant shame, a British study finds.

To measure just how much of an emotional impact genital warts have on patients, patients from Derriford Hospital in Plymouth, England completed a series of questionnaires that assessed factors including demographics, general levels of shame and self-esteem, and impact of genital warts on quality of life. The responses of a group of patients with genital warts who attended the hospital’s genitourinary medicine clinic (as STD clinics in the U.K. are called) were compared with two control groups (one of STD clinic patients with no symptoms and another from an orthopedic clinic).

Compared to the two control groups, patients with genital warts group had lower self-esteem and much higher shame scores. There was no significant difference in shame and self-esteem scores between the two controls.

The authors say their study supports other research that also finds the impact of genital warts goes far beyond the physical, and that health care providers should be aware of the psychosocial impact of warts. They suggest appropriate counseling can play a meaningful role in helping patients to cope, citing research that finds negative feelings associated with warts are diminished when patients learn that both HPV and genital warts are common.

References: