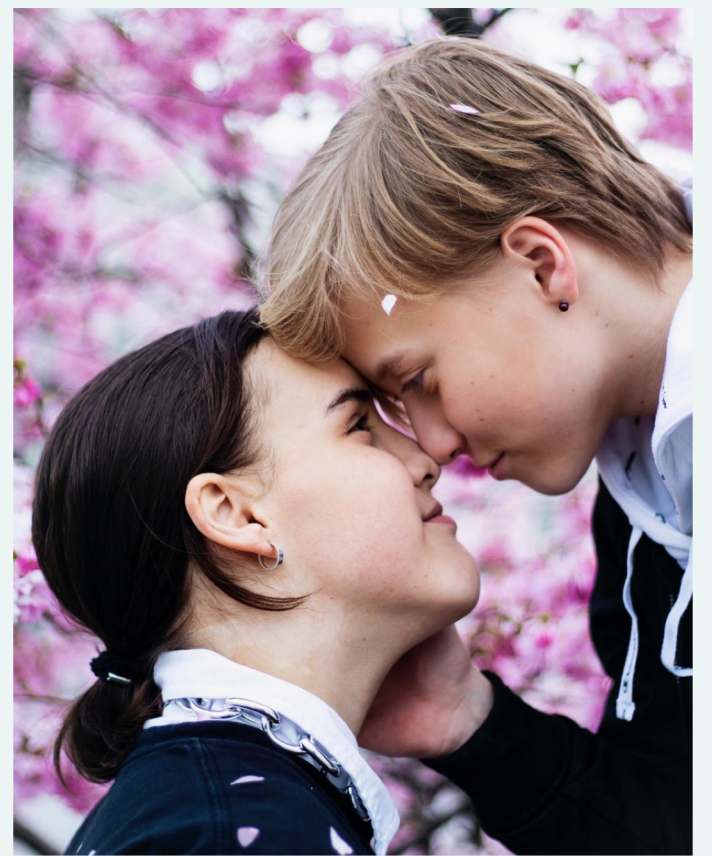


# Relationship and sexuality in IBD

## The perspective of healthcare professionals



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### Conclusion

Healthcare professionals state that conversations concerning relationships and sexuality rarely happen. The conversations mainly focus on fertility and erection problems. In a previous study, 78% of patients stated problems concerning intimacy and 64% asked for active support from the healthcare professionals. Our new results indicate a need for an increased knowledge and awareness about these concerns among healthcare professionals.

### Background

Previous research has demonstrated that inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) adversely affects aspects of intimacy and sexual health. Many IBD-patients experience that the disease impairs the possibility of creating relationships. A recent Swedish study revealed that a large part of IBD-patients experience difficulties concerning relationships and sexuality, and many wish for a more active support from healthcare professionals.

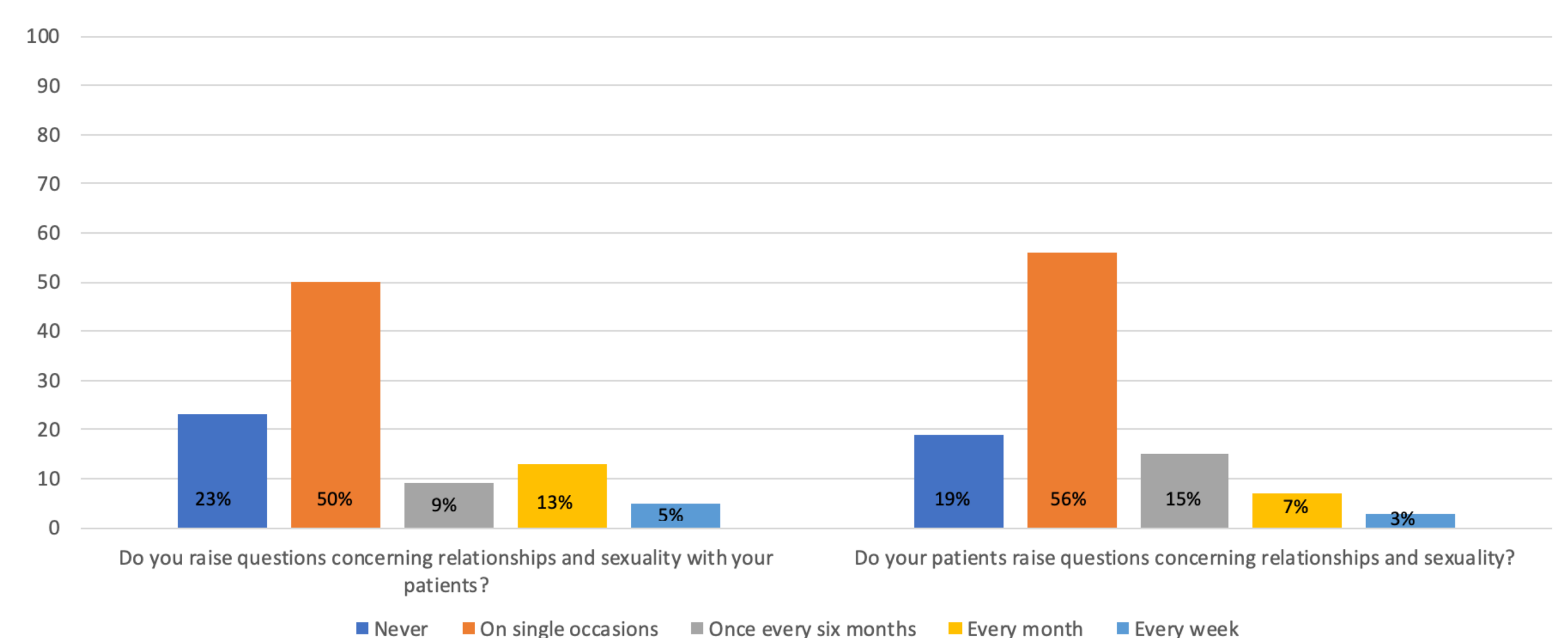
### Aim

The aim was to explore the current situation and knowledge concerning intimacy and sexuality from the perspective of healthcare professionals.

### Method

A digital, anonymous questionnaire was sent to healthcare professionals in Sweden with the help of several professional associations working with IBD-patients. The questionnaire contained 19 questions concerning problems that patients raise with respect to relationships, intimacy and sexuality and how they are taken care of in routine health care.

Figure 1: Distribution of the whole group (N=118)



### Results

Of 118 respondents, the majority were women (73%) and the mean age was 51 years. About half of the respondents (54%) were nurses, 28% were gastroenterologists, 11% were surgeons, and 7% had another profession. The responders had on average worked 13 years in IBD care. Overall the answers were consistent over different professions why results are presented for the whole group.

One-half answered that they raise questions concerning relationships and sexuality with their patients on single occasions, while 23% stated that they never did so (Figure 1). 56% indicated that the patients themselves ask questions concerning intimacy on single occasions, while 19% stated that it never happens (Figure 1). 15% of the respondents stated that they had access to a sexual therapist and 45% had the possibility to refer to a psychologist or psychotherapist.

When IBD-patients raise questions concerning relationships and sexuality, issues mainly concern fertility in women and erection problems in men. According to the healthcare professionals, both male and female patients report decreased sexual desire, a sense of not feeling attractive, and concerns about intestinal leakage. Women, also mention concerns regarding pain during intercourse, related to perianal fistulas and abdominal pain.

### Swedish ROS-group (Relationship and sexuality)

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