

# Exhibitionistic Disorder

Code: 302.4 (F65.2)

Exhibitionistic Disorder  
302.4 (F65.2)  
Exhibitionistic Disorder  
**Diagnostic Criteria 302.4 (F65.2)**

A. Over a period of at least 6 months, recurrent and intense sexual arousal from the exposure of one's genitals to an unsuspecting person, as manifested by fantasies, urges, or behaviors.

B. The individual has acted on these sexual urges with a nonconsenting person, or the sexual urges or fantasies cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Specify whether:

Sexually aroused by exposing genitals to prepubertal children

Sexually aroused by exposing genitals to physically mature individuals

Sexually aroused by exposing genitals to prepubertal children and to physically mature individuals

Specify if:

In a controlled environment: This specifier is primarily applicable to individuals living in institutional or other settings where opportunities to expose one's genitals are restricted.

In full remission: The individual has not acted on the urges with a nonconsenting person, and there has been no distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other areas of functioning, for at least 5 years while in an uncontrolled environment.

## Subtypes

The subtypes for exhibitionistic disorder are based on the age or physical maturity of the non-consenting individuals to whom the individual prefers to expose his or her genitals. The non-consenting individuals could be prepubescent children, adults, or both. This specifier should help draw adequate attention to characteristics of victims of individuals with exhibitionistic disorder to prevent co-occurring pedophilic disorder from being overlooked. However, indications that the individual with exhibitionistic disorder is sexually attracted to exposing his or her genitals to children should not preclude a diagnosis of pedophilic disorder.

## Specifiers

The "in full remission" specifier does not address the continued presence or absence of exhibitionism per se, which may still be present after behaviors and distress have remitted.

**Diagnostic Features**

The diagnostic criteria for exhibitionistic disorder can apply both to individuals who more or less freely disclose this paraphilia and to those who categorically deny any sexual attraction to exposing their genitals to unsuspecting persons despite substantial objective evidence to the contrary. If disclosing individuals also report psychosocial difficulties because of their sexual attractions or preferences for exposing, they may be diagnosed with exhibitionistic disorder. In contrast, if they declare no distress (exemplified by absence of anxiety, obsessions, and guilt or shame about these paraphilic impulses) and are not impaired by this sexual interest in other important areas of functioning, and their self-reported, psychiatric, or legal histories indicate that they do not act on them, they could be ascertained as having exhibitionistic sexual interest but not be diagnosed with exhibitionistic disorder.

Examples of nondisclosing individuals include those who have exposed themselves repeatedly to unsuspecting persons on separate occasions but who deny any urges or fantasies about such sexual behavior and who report that known episodes of exposure were all accidental and nonsexual. Others may disclose past episodes of sexual behavior involving genital exposure but refute any significant or sustained sexual interest in such behavior. Since these individuals deny having urges or fantasies involving genital exposure, it follows that they would also deny feeling subjectively distressed or socially impaired by such impulses. Such individuals may be diagnosed with exhibitionistic disorder despite their negative self-report. Recurrent exhibitionistic behavior constitutes sufficient support for exhibitionism (Criterion A) and simultaneously demonstrates that this paraphilically motivated behavior is causing harm to others (Criterion B).

"Recurrent" genital exposure to unsuspecting others (i.e., multiple victims, each on a separate occasion) may, as a general rule, be interpreted as three or more victims on separate occasions. Fewer victims can be interpreted as satisfying this criterion if there were multiple occasions of exposure to the same victim, or if there is corroborating evidence of a strong or preferential interest in genital exposure to unsuspecting persons. Note that multiple victims, as suggested earlier, are a sufficient but not a necessary condition for diagnosis, as criteria may be met by an individual's acknowledging intense exhibitionistic sexual interest with distress and/or impairment.

The Criterion A time frame, indicating that signs or symptoms of exhibitionism must have persisted for at least 6 months, should also be understood as a general guideline, not a strict threshold, to ensure that the sexual interest in exposing one's genitals to unsuspecting others is not merely transient. This might be expressed in clear evidence of repeated behaviors or distress over a nontransient period shorter than 6 months.

**Prevalence**

The prevalence of exhibitionistic disorder is unknown. However, based on exhibitionistic sexual acts in nonclinical or general populations, the highest possible prevalence for exhibitionistic disorder in the male population is 2%–4%. The prevalence of exhibitionistic disorder in females is even more uncertain but is generally believed to be much lower than in males.

## Development and Course

Adult males with exhibitionistic disorder often report that they first became aware of sexual interest in exposing their genitals to unsuspecting persons during adolescence, at a somewhat later time than the typical development of normative sexual interest in women or men. Although there is no minimum age requirement for the diagnosis of exhibitionistic disorder, it may be difficult to differentiate exhibitionistic behaviors from age-appropriate sexual curiosity in adolescents. Whereas exhibitionistic impulses appear to emerge in adolescence or early adulthood, very little is known about persistence over time. By definition, exhibitionistic disorder requires one or more contributing factors, which may change over time with or without treatment; subjective distress (e.g., guilt, shame, intense sexual frustration, loneliness), mental disorder comorbidity, hypersexuality, and sexual impulsivity; psychosocial impairment; and/or the propensity to act out sexually by exposing the genitals to unsuspecting persons. Therefore, the course of exhibitionistic disorder is likely to vary with age. As with other sexual preferences, advancing age may be associated with decreasing exhibitionistic sexual preferences and behavior.

## Risk and Prognostic Factors

Temperamental. Since exhibitionism is a necessary precondition for exhibitionistic disorder, risk factors for exhibitionism should also increase the rate of exhibitionistic disorder. Antisocial history, antisocial personality disorder, alcohol misuse, and pedophilic sexual preference might increase risk of sexual recidivism in exhibitionistic offenders.

Proteuristic Disorder 691

Hence, antisocial personality disorder, alcohol use disorder, and pedophilic interest may be considered risk factors for exhibitionistic disorder in males with exhibitionistic sexual preferences.

Environmental. Childhood sexual and emotional abuse and sexual preoccupation/hypersexuality have been suggested as risk factors for exhibitionism, although the causal relationship to exhibitionism is uncertain and the specificity unclear.

## Gender-Related Diagnostic Issues

Exhibitionistic disorder is highly unusual in females, whereas single sexually arousing exhibitionistic acts might occur up to half as often among women compared with men.

## Functional Consequences of Exhibitionistic Disorder

The functional consequences of exhibitionistic disorder have not been addressed in research involving individuals who have not acted out sexually by exposing their genitals to unsuspecting strangers but who fulfill Criterion B by experiencing intense emotional distress over these preferences.

## Differential Diagnosis

Potential differential diagnoses for exhibitionistic disorder sometimes occur also as comorbid disorders. Therefore, it is generally necessary to evaluate the evidence for exhibitionistic disorder and other possible conditions as separate questions.

Conduct disorder and antisocial personality disorder. Conduct disorder in adolescents and antisocial personality disorder would be characterized by additional norm-breaking and antisocial behaviors, and the specific sexual interest in exposing the genitals should be lacking.

Substance use disorders. Alcohol and substance use disorders might involve single exhibitionistic episodes by intoxicated individuals but should not involve the typical sexual interest in exposing the genitals to unsuspecting persons. Hence, recurrent exhibitionistic sexual fantasies, urges, or behaviors that occur also when the individual is not intoxicated suggest that exhibitionistic disorder might be present.

## Comorbidity

Known comorbidities in exhibitionistic disorder are largely based on research with individuals (almost all males) convicted for criminal acts involving genital exposure to non-consenting individuals. Hence, these comorbidities might not apply to all individuals who qualify for a diagnosis of exhibitionistic disorder. Conditions that occur comorbidly with exhibitionistic disorder at high rates include depressive, bipolar, anxiety, and substance