

Partner issues significantly influence women's sexual activity in later years, study shows

June 25 2009

As a woman gets older, physical problems are less likely to influence whether she is sexually active than her partner's health or interest in sex, according to a new study by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco and Kaiser Permanente.

The study also showed significant differences in the frequency of sexual activity, as well as sexual desire and satisfaction, among racial groups of middle-aged and elderly women. Study results appear in the June 24, 2009 online version of the "[Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#)."

In the study of nearly 2,000 women, aged 45 to 80 years old, 43 percent reported at least moderate [sexual desire](#), and 60 percent had been sexually active in the previous three months. Half of all sexually active participants described their overall sexual satisfaction as moderate to high. More than one quarter of women aged 65 years or older remained moderately or highly interested in sex, and more than one third of women in this age group had been sexually active in the past three months.

Among sexually inactive women in the entire group, the most common reason was lack of interest in sex (39 percent), followed by lack of a partner (36 percent), physical problem of partner (23 percent) and lack of interest by partner (11 percent). Only nine percent were inactive from personal physical problems.

Sexual activity was defined as any activity that was arousing, including masturbation.

"Our findings indicate that a substantial portion of women are interested and engaged in sexual activity as they age," said lead author Alison Huang, MD, assistant professor in internal medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. "Clinicians should consider a woman's overall health when addressing concerns about sexual inactivity. However, treatment directed solely at improving women's sexual functioning, such as medications, may not substantially affect their activity if partner issues also are not addressed."

The U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse and older, as the first wave of baby boomers is turning 65 years old. Researchers evaluated multiple dimensions of sexual functioning among a racially and ethnically diverse group of middle-aged and older women who self-identified demographic characteristics, medical history, medication use and health habits. More than half the women in the overall study were of non-white ethnicity -- 20 percent were African American, 18 percent were Latina, and 19 percent were Asian - and over two-thirds of participants were married or living as married.

African American women were more likely than white women to report at least moderate desire but less likely to report weekly [sexual activity](#), and sexually active Latinas were more likely than white women to report at least moderate sexual satisfaction.

"To date, research has focused rather narrowly on the physical factors that contribute to women's sexual response, and very little analysis has explored sexual function among racially and ethnically diverse women. Further work is needed to understand the differences in self-reported sexual functioning by race, and how they change as women age. Ultimately, this information should help guide clinicians in discussing

sexual problems with [women](#) of diverse backgrounds," said Huang.

Source: University of California - San Francisco

Citation: Partner issues significantly influence women's sexual activity in later years, study shows (2009, June 25) retrieved 23 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-06-partner-issues-significantly-women-sexual.html>

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