

Majority of women sext, many use dating apps to find partners, global study finds

September 14 2020, by Mary Keck



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The Kinsey Institute at Indiana University and Clue, a Berlin-based female health company, have released the largest known survey of women's sex-tech engagement, and the first to explore this topic on a

global level.

Featuring responses from over 130,000 women in 191 countries, the study—"Mobile sex-tech apps: How use differs across global areas of high and low gender equality," published in the journal *PLOS ONE*—offers an unprecedented look at how women around the world interact with dating and sex-related mobile apps to answer questions, seek information and improve their sexual lives in the process.

"While researchers have conducted a vast array of studies on sex, love and technology, we've been really limited in what we know about these associations outside of North America or Western Europe," said study lead author Amanda Gesselman, associate director for research at the Kinsey Institute. "This is the first study that's been able to give us insight into the use of technology in the sexual lives of such a large number women around the world."

Over half of all women (57.7 percent) reported having received or sent sexting messages, and this was consistent across all geographic areas. Researchers were surprised to learn that women in countries with higher gender inequality reported being more than four times more likely to report sexting than women in more egalitarian regions.

"This suggests that more conservative ideals regarding gender roles do not necessarily prevent women from engaging in taboo or forbidden behaviors," said Virginia Vitzthum, professor of anthropology at Indiana University, Kinsey Institute senior scientist and senior research scientist at Clue. "This insight opens up an entirely novel line of inquiry for understanding how women navigate social expectations to meet their own needs and desires."

The study also found that women in places with greater gender inequality were twice as likely to report that they've used apps to improve their

sexual relationships, whereas women from places with lower inequality were more likely to report that they've used apps to learn about [sexual relationships](#).

"This is an important distinction for researchers who may be creating educational programming or interventions, because it indicates that women in areas of more inequality aren't necessarily looking for sex education as we might conceptualize it in the U.S., starting from the more basic concepts and working up," Gesselman said. "Instead, these women are looking specifically to build on what they already have."

Of the 11 percent of women globally who reported using an app to improve their relationship, the three most common reasons they gave were staying connected with a partner they could not see in person (5 percent); facilitating exploration of new sexual experiences, such as new sex toys or positions (3.6 percent); and helping them learn what their partner finds arousing (3.4 percent).

The study found that about one-fifth (21.8 percent) of women used mobile apps to find partners. This was more common in Oceania (one in three) than in North America and Europe (one in four) or Asia and Africa (one in five).

Globally, women reported that the most common kinds of partners they sought were short-term partners (9 percent), chatting and/or sexting partners (8.7 percent) or long-term partners (8.6 percent). The exception was women in East Africa, who reported seeking "friends with benefits" (8.1 percent) and long-term partners (4.1 percent) most commonly. Although women in areas with more gender inequality were less likely overall to use mobile apps to find sexual partners, they were just as likely to use apps to find chatting/sexting partners.

One of the most exciting findings for the researchers was that despite

global differences in how women reported using mobile apps for dating or sex-related purposes, the act of seeking out information through internet-connected mobile phones was a positive experience for the vast majority of women in the study. Less than 1 percent globally reported apps as detrimental (0.2 percent) or not useful (0.6 percent).

"There's a near-universal desire to seek romantic and sexual connections," Vitzthum said. "With rising access to smartphones, people around the world increasingly form these connections online. The Clue-Kinsey sex-tech survey used the same technology to reveal for the first time how [women](#) have adapted sex-tech to their lives, no matter where they live."

Data for the survey were collected via an anonymous questionnaire, developed by Clue with consultation from the collaborating researchers. Participants were recruited through Clue's newsletter, website and social media accounts, and the social media accounts of the Kinsey Institute.

More information: Amanda N. Gesselman et al. Mobile sex-tech apps: How use differs across global areas of high and low gender equality, *PLOS ONE* (2020). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0238501](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238501)

Provided by Indiana University

Citation: Majority of women sext, many use dating apps to find partners, global study finds (2020, September 14) retrieved 24 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2020-09-majority-women-sext-dating-apps.html>

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