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HEAT AND SPICE IN LATER YEARS OF LIFE

Varsha Reddy Jayar^a, T K Biswas^a and Dattatray More^a^aM G M Institute of Health Sciences, India

Background: Society tends to hold the idea that older people simply do not participate in or enjoy sex as much as younger people. Sexual function and activity in old age have been inadequately studied the world over. It is important to know that aging processes are not confined to persons beyond the age of 60 years; many changes in the elderly have their antecedents in the middle age. One study even showed that a significant amount of the elderly has pronounced their sex lives over at around age 50 to 60. Although sex might not be as taboo as it used to be, the idea of sex as one gets older is still clouded with myths and uncertainty.

Aims: This study determines the patterns of sexual activity and function in individuals over 60 years of age. It also discusses the barriers such as chronic illness, cultural barriers and myths that may interfere with sexual function.

Materials and Methods: A study of subjects above the age of 60 years from a senior citizens group in the outpatient department of Geriatric Medicine (OPD) of MGM a teaching hospital in Mumbai, by interviewing 200 individuals who attended the OPDs, after taking their informed consent. Socio-demographic and other information on their sexual function and activities were obtained. Data was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences v15.

Results: 72% individuals above 60 were sexually active, while only 57% above 70 were active. Others had become completely abstinent at some time in their lives. Statistical analysis revealed significant gender, health and educational status based differences in the sample.

Conclusion: Many factors support the myth that older people are asexual: limited access to information from their youth to the present day, the physiological changes connected to aging itself, religious precepts and family oppression. However, further studies and actions directed at this population are important to promote the health of the elderly. Our study showed significant presence of sexual desire, activity and function even after the age of 60 years; a decline by the age of 70 and above was a finding that reflected more in women. Chronic illness did affect sexual function and desire.

Biography

Varsha Reddy (International Healthcare Management), a Post graduate student of M.D Geriatric Medicine has been associated with Geriatric healthcare delivery across United Kingdom and India. She has managerial experience in NHS in Heartlands Hospital Birmingham, George Elliot Hospital Nuneaton and Whippscross Hospital London, where she contributed voluntary services in holistic healing promoting wellness. While pursuing MD Geriatric Medicine in M.G.M Institute of Health Sciences, Navi Mumbai ; she pioneered the "Helping Hands" program which focuses on senior citizen self support groups which deliver peer assistance within the community providing philanthropic services. She has initiated efforts in Tele-medicine, Polypharmacy and contingency management approaches for Geriatric care with special interest in sexuality in elderly, communication skills with elderly and Geriatric cosmetology. She is the recipient of the Ministry of Health Award for Volunteer work in Earthquake Relief, in addition to the many accolades for sports and educational achievement.

varsha.jayar@gmail.com

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