

New study explores role of sexual, social behaviors in seniors' well-being

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Researchers and the general public have a new resource for information on the health and intimate relationships of older people, thanks to a new supplemental issue of *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological and Social Sciences* (Volume 64B, Supplement 1).

Based on the groundbreaking National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP), the supplement's 14 articles focus on demographic characteristics; social networks; social and cultural activity; physical and mental health, including cognition, well-being, illness, medications, and alternative therapies; history of sexual and intimate partnerships; and patient-physician communication.

"The NSHAP represents an extraordinary contribution to the study of aging, and published findings from it have already shed new light on critical issues in social gerontology — from abuse to sexuality, said *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences* Editor Kenneth F. Ferraro, PhD, of Purdue University. "A truly distinctive feature of the study is the collection of several biomeasures on a national sample."

The NSHAP is a unique, interdisciplinary effort to collect social data alongside biological indicators in a population-based sample of [older adults](#). The study collected 13 biomeasures, including the assessment of respondents' weight, waist circumference, height, blood pressure, distance vision, smell, touch, and mobility. NSHAP also collected blood spots, saliva, oral fluid for HIV testing, and, from female respondents, a self-administered vaginal swab.

Sexuality among older adults tended to vary with [age](#) and gender. At all ages in the study, men were more likely than women to have a partner, more likely to be sexually active with that partner, and tend to have more positive and permissive attitudes toward sex.

Similarly, men were more likely than women to report alcohol use, potential problem drinking, and ever having smoked. Alcohol use and smoking were also lower among older age groups.

This information can provide physicians and public health policy makers with a scientific base of knowledge for advising older people about positive social and intimate relationships, as well as designing health programs to capitalize on and promote these relationships.

The NSHAP is based on data gathered from interviews of 3,005 community-dwelling older adults (aged 57 to 85) across the U.S. between July 2005 and March 2006. Blacks and Hispanics were oversampled, as were the oldest old, providing adequate cases for analyses by age, gender, and race/ethnicity. This study was supported by the National Institutes of Health, including the National Institute on Aging, the Office of Research on Women's [Health](#), the Office of AIDS Research, and the Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research.

More information: [psychsocgerontology.oxfordjour ...
4B/suppl_1/index.dtl](https://psychsocgerontology.oxfordjournals.org/doi/full/10.1093/psyc/4B/suppl_1/index.dtl)

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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