

Back on the market—understanding condom use in the over-50s

April 14 2016, by Niki Widdowson

Sexually transmitted diseases are on the rise in the over-50 age group and, in fact, could surpass the infection rates of younger people, says a QUT researcher investigating the low use of condoms in this age group.

QUT social marketing masters student Natalie Bowring, from QUT Business School, said emerging trends suggested the incidence of [sexually transmitted infections](#) (STIs) in [older adults](#), 50-plus, had doubled between 2004-2010.

"Sexually active older Australians are contracting chlamydia and gonorrhoea in rapidly increasing numbers," Ms Bowring said.

Ms Bowring hopes to interview heterosexual people aged 50 years or older, who have been sexually active within the past 12 months on their beliefs and attitudes towards [condoms](#) to better understand the barriers and motivators of unprotected sex.

"With life events leaving many older adults divorced or widowed and multiple platforms such as internet dating and international travel, more and more older adults are increasingly 'back on the market' and actively seeking sexual relationships," Ms Bowring said.

"Using a condom could prevent STIs but this age group tends to see condoms in terms of contraception rather than a form of protection.

"This could be because older adults began their sexual lives in a time of

unprecedented sexual freedom thanks to the pill and the women's liberation movement.

"The rising rate of infection indicates older heterosexual adults are engaging in frequent, risky sexual behaviour but very little research has been done on why they are not using condoms or how to encourage their use in this age group.

"In the UK, which has had a similar STI increase, they have tackled this situation with the [Middle-age Spread campaign](#) which focuses on condoms improving over 50s' sexual health."

Ms Bowring would like to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants who volunteer for the study. Participants need to be 50 years or older, heterosexual, not in a committed relationship and to have been sexually active within the past 12 months.

She is also interested in speaking to condom manufacturers and marketers about the development of condoms for the more "experienced" older adult market.

"While ageist attitudes would have us believe that older adults magically become asexual, this is clearly not the case," Ms Bowring said.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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