

Research finds that older people's sexual problems are being dismissed

December 6 2016



Credit: University of Manchester

Older people's sexual activity problems and desires are being dismissed by health practitioners due to their age, a new study has suggested.

Research by The University of Manchester's MICRA (Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing) and Manchester Metropolitan University highlighted the obstacles some older couples face in maintaining fulfilling sexual lives, and how they adapt to these barriers.

The study analysed written comments from over a thousand adults aged 50 to 90 who responded to the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing Sexual Health and Relationships questionnaire. Respondents of both sexes emphasised their anxiety at not being taken seriously by health practitioners as they sought to overcome issues affecting their [sexual activity](#), such as a drop in sexual desire or physical difficulties. One man in his eighties reported being refused Viagra for erectile dysfunction on the grounds of cost.

Participants in the study, published in *Ageing and Society*, cited other elements influencing sexual activity, including health conditions and physical impairment, the evolving status of sex in relationships and mental wellbeing. It was also found that men were more likely to talk about the impact of [health conditions](#) on sexual activities, but women were more likely to talk about health-related sexual difficulties in the context of a relationship.

The study recommends that health care practice should positively engage with issues of sexual function and sexual activity to improve the health and wellbeing of [older people](#), particularly in the context of long-term health problems.

"This research further improves our understanding of love and intimacy in later life", said study co-author David Lee, Research Fellow from The University of Manchester. "It builds upon empirical findings published in our earlier paper (Sexual health and wellbeing among older men and women in England; *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*) which described a

detailed picture of the sex lives of older men and women. However, this new research uses narrative data to better understand how changing age, health and relationships interrelate to impact sexual health and satisfaction."

"Appreciating individual and personal perspectives around sexuality and sexual [health](#) is of paramount importance if we are to improve [sexual health](#) services for older people."

More information: JOSIE TETLEY et al. Let's talk about sex – what do older men and women say about their sexual relations and sexual activities? A qualitative analysis of ELSA Wave 6 data, *Ageing and Society* (2016). [DOI: 10.1017/S0144686X16001203](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X16001203)

Provided by University of Manchester

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