

Sexual health and sexual well-being not an irrelevance to older people

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Credit: University of Manchester

A new report from The University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University has highlighted that the sexual health of older people should not be overlooked by health care professionals in the

broader context of maintaining well-being during ageing.

'How long will I love you? Sex and intimacy in later life', published by The University of Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and think-tank the International Longevity Centre (ILC-UK), has analysed data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing to examine difficulties with sexual activities and function, attitudes towards sex and details about the current sexual partners of over 50s. This work also builds on collaborative work with Dr Sharron Hinchliffe at the University of Sheffield.

The data, gathered from over 7000 over 50s, found that women over 80 were more likely to share the sexual likes of their partner, feel emotionally close to them and not feel obligated to have sex with them than those aged 50-79.

Men over 80 also reported that they were more likely to share the sexual likes of their partner and feel emotionally close to them than those aged 50-79. However, men over 80 also reported that they felt a greater degree of obligation to have sex with their partner than at any age between 50-79.

Using the Satisfaction with Life Scale measurement of subjective wellbeing, 'How long will I love you?' also found that for both men and women aged 50-90+, there was a positive association between frequency of kissing, fondling and petting and overall levels of subjective wellbeing.

However, whilst women's subjective wellbeing continued to increase with frequency of intimate behaviour, subjective wellbeing was slightly lower amongst men who reported having sexual intercourse with their partners every day than it was for those who reported intercourse 2/3 times per week.

However, despite the report's findings on the importance of intimacy in later life, it concludes that not enough is being done to ensure that older people have access to good [sexual health](#) care and support.

"We know that many men and women remain sexually active throughout their lives, and that intimate relationships in later life can continue to have a positive impact of overall health and wellbeing," said Baroness Sally Greengross OBE, Chief Executive of ILC-UK. "Unfortunately, in 2017 there is still a need to dispel myths around relationships in later life."

"Organisations like the ILC-UK will continue to make the case for a life course approach to sexual health and relationships which sees advice and services available from the college to the care home."

"We know that positive sexuality and intimacy throughout the lifecourse is linked to higher levels of happiness and well-being – irrespective of age," said Dr David Lee, Research Fellow at The University of Manchester. "Older people have a right to good sexual [health care](#) and should be able to easily access joined up services to help them meet that goal"

"Health professionals need to proactively engage with older people to better manage problems that impact on both individuals and couples sexual health and function. By normalising conversations around sex and [older people](#), health professionals can help to counter stereotypes and misconceptions around sex in later life, which will ultimately improve public health."

Provided by University of Manchester

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