

# Connection found between low sexual interest and household disorder

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Older partnered adults are especially likely to report low sexual interest if they live in a disorderly home environment, according to a new study published by University of Toronto researchers. Overall, just over a quarter of cohabiting and married U.S. men aged 62-90 indicate that they have lacked sexual interest in the past year. The number is closer to 40% among men who live in particularly dirty, odorous, untidy, noisy, and in poorly repaired homes. This association between home environments and sexual interest was found after adjusting for other established risks of sexual dysfunction, including chronic health conditions, disability, mental health problems, and low cognitive capacity.

"A lot of recent research suggests that regular sexual expression can improve psychological and physical well-being in later life," said lead author, Markus Schafer, an associate professor of sociology at University of Toronto. "At the same time, many factors can suppress the sexual interest of either partner and become barriers to sexual activity or satisfaction. We were curious as to whether circumstances in the local environment could dampen sexual interest. Our findings suggest that it's important to put sex into context and to consider how late-life intimacy can be responsive to residential conditions."

The study was based upon a representative sample of 955 heterosexual couples interviewed in the 2010 U.S. National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP). Each married or cohabiting couple included at least one partner between the age of 62 and 90. To study household

disorder, the authors relied on observations made by in-home NSHAP interviewers who evaluated multiple dimensions of the respondent's house. Schafer and his team combined the various ratings into a summary scale of 'household disorder', using scores from the scale to predict both partners' reports of sexual interest. The researchers also considered measures of 'neighbourhood disorder'—interviewers' evaluations of whether the couples' block was dirty, odorous, and/or poorly-kept. Such block-level conditions, however, were not associated with sexual interest.

Researchers cannot determine exactly why household disorder predicts lower sexual interest among older men. Results, for instance, failed to show that perceptions of partnership quality played an important role. However, co-author James Iveniuk, a post-doctoral researcher at Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, suggests that "an unkempt home may be a stressor that reduces interest in sex, as well as signalling the inappropriateness of one's home as a place for [sexual activity](#)."

Co-author and PhD student, Laura Upenieks commented, "Our findings suggest that more nuanced attention be given to the challenges of maintaining [home](#) conditions in later life, an especially important endeavor since partnered seniors will be aging in place for longer periods of time than in earlier decades and tend to spend the majority of time in their own homes. In terms of practical implications, households should be prudent points of intervention for assisting older adults, which could spur wide-ranging benefits within and beyond the bedroom."

The paper was published online this week at *The Gerontologist*.

**More information:** Markus H. Schafer et al. Putting Sex Into Context in Later Life: Environmental Disorder and Sexual Interest Among Partnered Seniors, *The Gerontologist* (2017). [DOI](#):

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