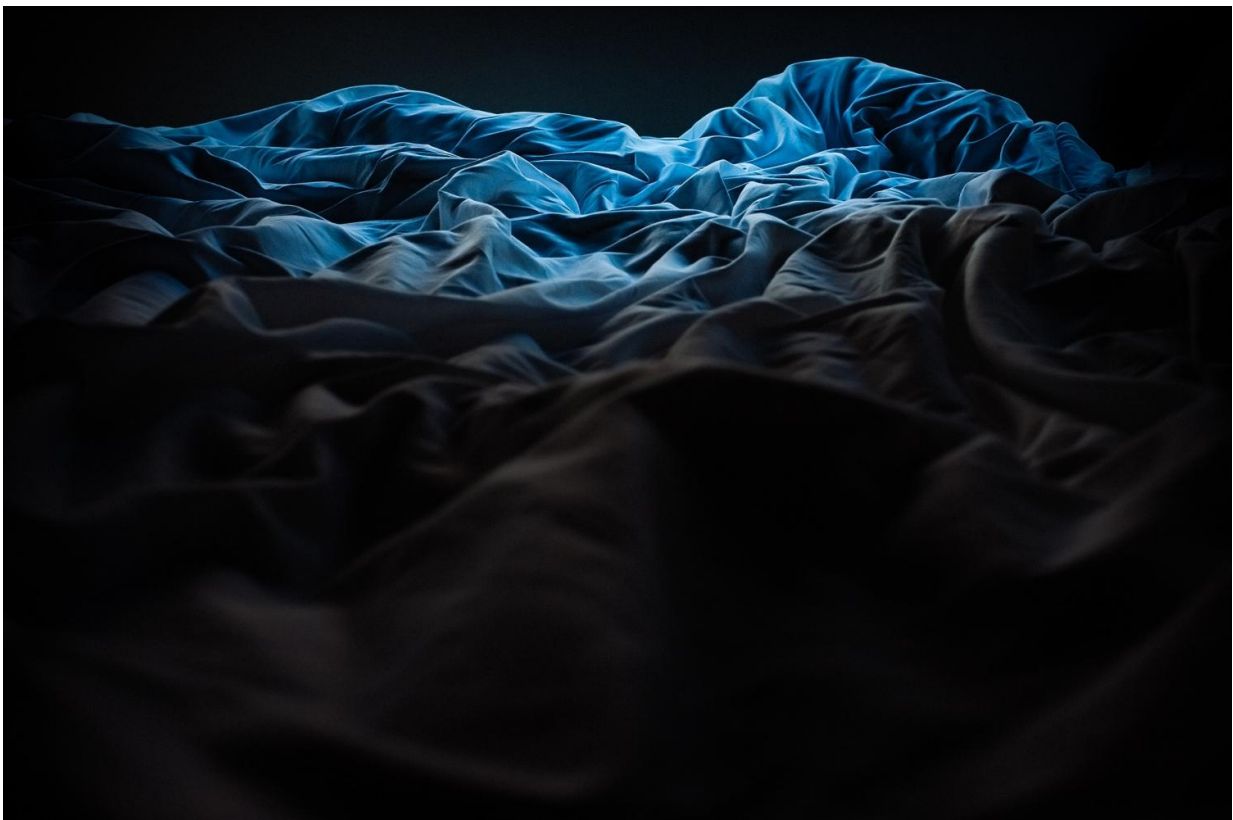


Open communication and emotional closeness linked to fewer low sexual interest problems

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British women living with a partner are more than twice as likely to lack interest in sex compared to men living with a partner, according to a new

study published in the *BMJ Open*.

Women in relationships lasting more than a year are more likely to report lacking interest in sex than those in relationships lasting one year or less.

The findings come from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3) which is the largest scientific study of sexual health lifestyles in Britain.

Natsal-3 was carried out by researchers at University College London, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, and NatCen Social Research. The study was funded by the UK Medical Research Council and the Wellcome Trust, with support from the Economic and Social Research Council and the Department of Health.

The nationally representative survey interviewed 6,669 [women](#) and 4,839 men aged between 16 and 74 who reported at least one sexual partner in the past year. Overall, 34 per cent of women and 15 per cent of men reported lacking interest in sex. Half of these people - 62 per cent of women and 53 per cent of men - said that they were distressed by their lack of interest in sex.

Those who found it always easy to talk about sex with their partner were less likely to report lacking interest. This was true for men as well as women.

Professor Cynthia Graham, of the Centre for Sexual Health Research at the University of Southampton and lead author on the paper, said: "Our findings show us the importance of the relational context in understanding low sexual interest in both men and women. For women in particular, the quality and length of relationship and communication with their partners are important in their experience of sexual interest. It

highlights the need to assess and - if necessary - treat sexual interest problems in a holistic and relationship-, as well as gender-specific way."

The study also revealed other things linked to low interest in sex in men and women:

- Reporting an STI in the last year
- Ever experiencing sex against your will
- Poor mental and physical health
- Not feeling emotionally close to partner during sex

It also found things linked to low interest in sex among women only:

- Having three or more partners in the past year
- Having children under five years old in the household
- Not sharing the same sexual likes and dislikes as [partner](#)

Co-author Dr Kirstin Mitchell, at the MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences Unit, University of Glasgow, commented: "The findings on the strong association between open sexual communication and a reduced likelihood of sexual interest problems emphasise the importance of providing a broad sexual and relationships education rather than limiting attention only to adverse consequences of sex and how to prevent them."

More information: Factors associated with reporting lacking interest in sex and their interaction with gender: Findings from the third British National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles, *BMJ Open* (2017). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-016942](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2017-016942)

Provided by University of Southampton

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