

## SEXUAL HEALTH AT 45+ AND OLDER AGES IN SPAIN AT THE XXI CENTURY

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### ***What are the main elements which generate satisfaction in sexual relationships within women aged 45 or more?***

The data indicate that elements like beliefs and attitudes are more important than sexual practices to determine the satisfaction degree in women relationships during the ageing process. Indispensable elements to develop satisfactory sexual relationships are a good physical and mental state, relationship perceived as a communication act, tenderness and seduction, a favorable sexual life trajectory, information availability, and to value the importance of sexuality

#### **Objective:**

This study is focused on women sexuality comprising the period just before ageing (pre-menopause and menopause), ageing process (transition towards ageing), and the inclusion of ages at the end of the life cycle. We will investigate the sources of sexual satisfaction from the premises that it is mediated by psychological and social factors, and not simply by physiological factors.

#### **Methodology:**

We have statistically analyzed Encuesta Nacional de Salud Sexual (ENSS, National Poll on Sexual Health), which was carried out in 2009 by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS, Center for Sociological Studies). This poll addresses for the first time the study of sexuality above 50 years old. The sample consists in 1.236 women with a stable couple. They were reclassified into three age groups: 45 to 54 years old (555 women), from 55 to 64 years (426 women), and older than 65 years (255 women).

To make operative the dimensions of the “sexuality” concept, we have built 8 indicators, one for each dimension, each one containing different variables. On the one hand we analyze what we have considered as external factors, as the socio-demographic variables, the health state, and the state of mind, as well as the dualization of the family and work life. On the other hand, we study those aspects directly related to sexuality: opinions and beliefs, attitudes, behaviour and survival of sexual myths.

Our independent variable is “sexual satisfaction with the stable couple”. This variable has been cross tabulated with the whole observable variables through contingency tables. The cross tabulation has been carried out for all women, as well as for each age group. In those cases of association between a nominal and a ordinal variable we have used the V statistic from Cramer. In the association between ordinal variables we have used the D statistic from Somers and tau-b from Kendall.

#### **① Socio-Demographic Variables**

The variable exhibiting a higher association is Education; the higher the level of studies the better sexual satisfaction, maybe because the sexuality concept is richer.

#### **② Health state**

The health state deteriorates with age. Health self-perception get worse, the number of illnesses and the disability increase, and consumption of medical drugs increments.

We have confirmed that a good health state is an indispensable element to enjoy sexual relationships. The most determinant factor within younger women to impede satisfaction is disability. Within intermediate generations it is the self-perceived health state, and in the older generations the key factor is their objective health state.

### 3 State of mind

Self-esteem is based on self assessment, and it increases sexual satisfaction. In younger generations satisfaction is reached when they experience a good physical and psychological levels. Women within the intermediate age group reach a good state of mind through self-acceptance, both physically and psychologically, but they also require interaction with those people around them. Older generations reach a good state of mind through self care.

### 4 Coexistence of labour and family life

We have tried to evaluate if work sexual division, as well as the genre roles under traditional models (discriminatory), or more modern roles (egalitarian), had any influence in sexual life. Unfortunately, due the poll limitations, this aspect has not been clarified.

### 5 Opinions and beliefs in sexuality

We can distinguish two sexuality models within these age groups. The first one, including women aged 45 to 54 years old, is based in a definition of sexuality as a way to communicate, including sympathy, pleasure and intimacy, and a way to retrieve more satisfaction. The other group show an opposite character, including older women (from 65 years old onwards), which understand sexuality as a breeding activity. Women at intermediate ages are a transitional collective.

### 6 Attitudes respect sexuality

Sexual repression, together with the lack of attention towards creativity and imagination, and couple carelessness, are associated with sexual discomfort. Also, the higher satisfaction is reached through the use of practices implying a seduction component, as body caressing or kissing. It is not possible to deduce that older women are necessary passive, but rather that their wills are not taken into account by their couples, probably due to the fact that they have not been educated to express them properly.

### 7 Sexual behaviour

The poll includes all type of sexual practices, from kissing to cybersex, but not all of them are practised by women older than 45 years old. Consequently, sexual practices are not determinant for women to get pleasure relationships. Intercourse frequency is associated to satisfaction but not in a high degree, due to the fact that the answers are biased from an interpretation centered exclusively at the coitum, without taking into consideration kisses, embraces and caresses.

### 8 Sexual Myths

Older women still accept sexual myths, many of them originated from conservative ideologies and supported by repressive institutions (Church and the Franco dictatorship). These women accept that their sexuality is conditioned by their religious beliefs and their sexuality was biased by the procreation aspect of this concept. As a consequence, they just practice intercourse inside marriage, based in a romantic love concept. They feel themselves as objects of desire but not as subjects for desire.

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