

# *Sexual well-being in older European adults*

Seksuell Helse og Seksuelle Rettigheter 2020

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# THE HEALTHY SEXUAL AGING PROJECT

- A MIXED-METHOD STUDY OF SEXUAL FUNCTION AND SEXUAL WELL-BEING IN OLDER ADULTS IN NORWAY, DENMARK, BELGIUM, UNITED KINGDOM, CROATIA, AND PORTUGAL
- **Financed by the Norwegian Research Council 2016-2020**

# The Research Team

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- Assistant Professor Ana Alexandra Carvalheira (PI)

Population	Procedure	Participants	Response rate
Random, nationally representative samples of non-institutionalized 60-75 year olds	<p><b>Step 1:</b> Telephone contact with the selected sample by trained interviewers to ask for participation. Among those who volunteer to participate, socio-demographic characteristics was registered.</p> <p><b>Step 2:</b> Postal questionnaires with prepaid return envelopes. Socio-demographic questions were repeated to validate the questionnaire.</p>	<p>Norway n = 1271</p> <p>Denmark n = 1045</p> <p>Belgium = 991</p> <p>Portugal n = 509</p>	<p>Norway = 68%</p> <p>Denmark = 52%</p> <p>Belgium = 57%</p> <p>Portugal = 26%</p>
Subsample of couples randomly chosen from the larger sample.	<p><b>Step 3:</b> One postal reminder was sent to non-respondents. In Portugal the reminder was done by phone</p>	<p><u>Couples:</u></p> <p>Norway n = 218</p> <p>Denmark n = 207</p> <p>Belgium n = 135</p> <p>Portugal n = 117</p>	

# Sexual activity and sexual satisfaction



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**Sexual satisfaction and sexual activity (%)**

	Men				Women			
	Norway	Denmark	Belgium	Portugal	Norway	Denmark	Belgium	Portugal
<b>Sexually satisfaction</b>								
Dissatisfied	23	19	28	22	19	14	23	13
Neither nor	28	26	27	18	30	31	37	41
Satisfied	50	55	45	61	51	55	41	46
<b>Sexual activity in the past year</b>								
Yes	91	89	84	83	74	78	61	73

# Frequency of sexual activity in the past month (%)

	Men				Women			
	Norway	Denmark	Belgium	Portugal	Norway	Denmark	Belgium	Portugal
<b><u>Sexual intercourse</u></b>								
Not once	36	36	35	20	46	44	60	37
1-3 times/month	37	40	43	30	33	31	25	36
1+ times/week	28	23	22	50	21	25	26	28
<b><u>Masturbation</u></b>								
Not once	35	47	43	58	60	69	64	73
1-3 times/month	36	30	34	23	35	27	30	21
1+ times/week	29	24	23	20	6	4	6	5

## Sexual activity during the past 12 months in men (Adjusted Odds Ratio, AOR)

Norway		
	%	AOR
<b>Age group</b>		
60-64 years	96***	1.0
65-69 years	89	
70-75 years	86	0.3
<b>Level of education</b>		
Primary	79**	1.0
Secondary	90	
Tertiary	93	2.9
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Rural	90	
Medium urban	89	
Urban	95	
<b>Relationship status</b>		
No partner	70***	1.0
Partner	95	8.4
<b>Retired from work</b>		
No	96***	
Yes	87	
<b>Church attendance</b>		
Never	92	
Less than once a year	88	
Once or twice a year	89	
Once a month or more	96	



### Sexual activity during the past 12 months in women (Adjusted Odds Ratio, AOR)

Norway		
	%	AOR
<b><i>Age group</i></b>		
60-64 years	80***	
65-69 years	79	
70-75 years	62	
<b><i>Level of education</i></b>		
Primary	60**	1.0
Secondary	71	
Tertiary	79	2.6
<b><i>Place of residence</i></b>		
Rural	76	
Medium urban	73	
Urban	75	
<b><i>Relationship status</i></b>		
No partner	37***	1.0
Partner	90	15.6
<b><i>Retired from work</i></b>		
No	81***	
Yes	71	
<b><i>Church attendance</i></b>		
Never	73	
Less than once a year	78	
Once or twice a year	72	
Once a month or more	74	

### Sexual satisfaction in men (Adjusted Odds Ratio, AOR)

Norway		
	%	AOR
<b><i>Age group</i></b>		
60-64 years	51	
65-69 years	50	
70-75 years	47	
<b><i>Level of education</i></b>		
Primary	38	
Secondary	52	
Tertiary	50	
<b><i>Place of residence</i></b>		
Rural	49	
Medium urban	50	
Urban	50	
<b><i>Relationship status</i></b>		
No partner	17***	1.0
Partner	56	5.7
<b><i>Retired from work</i></b>		
No	50	
Yes	49	
<b><i>Church attendance</i></b>		
Never	47*	1.0
Less than once a year	46	
Once or twice a year	49	
Once a month or more	67	2.2

# Sexual satisfaction in women (Adjusted Odds Ratio, AOR)

	Norway	
	%	AOR
<b>Age group</b>		
60-64 years	51	
65-69 years	52	
70-75 years	49	
<b>Level of education</b>		
Primary	49	
Secondary	53	
Tertiary	50	
<b>Place of residence</b>		
Rural	57	
Medium urban	48	
Urban	46	
<b>Relationship status</b>		
No partner	26***	1.0
Partner	60	4.7
<b>Retired from work</b>		
No	51	
Yes	51	
<b>Church attendance</b>		
Never	52	
Less than once a year	47	
Once or twice a year	52	
Once a month or more	52	

## Men



**Less sexually satisfied**  
Most masturbation  
Medium sexual intercourse



**Least sexually satisfied**  
Medium masturbation  
Medium sexual intercourse



**Most sexually satisfied**  
Least masturbation  
Most sexual intercourse

## Women



**Most sexually satisfied**  
Medium masturbation  
Medium sexual intercourse



**Least sexually satisfied**  
Most masturbation  
Least sexual intercourse



**Less sexually satisfied**  
Least masturbation  
Most sexual intercourse

# Change in sexual interest and enjoyment



**Change in sexual interest and overall sexual enjoyment compared to 10 years ago (%)**

	Men				Women			
	Norway	Denmark	Belgium	Portugal	Norway	Denmark	Belgium	Portugal
<b>Sexually Interest</b>								
Lower	54	50	59	72	68	64	73	77
About the same	44	48	37	24	26	33	23	20
Higher	4	3	4	3	6	3	4	4
<b>Sexual enjoyment</b>								
Lower	54	45	65	73	56	56	70	74
About the same	40	51	28	22	34	38	22	21
Higher	7	4	8	6	10	6	8	4

**Rating of present interest in sex compared to 10 years ago in *men*** (Multiple regression analysis, standardized regression coefficients, weighted data)

Norway	
<b><u>Structural factors</u></b>	
Level of education	
<b><u>Personal factors</u></b>	
Age	-0.1 <sup>*</sup>
Sexual activity throughout life	
Health	-0.2 <sup>***</sup>
<b><u>Interpersonal factors</u></b>	
Duration of the relationship	-0.1 <sup>**</sup>
Emotional closeness to partner during sex	-0.1 <sup>*</sup>

**Rating of present interest in sex compared to 10 years ago in *women*** (Multiple regression analysis, standardized regression coefficients, weighted data)

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**Norway**

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**Structural factors**

Level of education

**Personal factors**

Age

Sexual activity throughout life

Health

**Interpersonal factors**

Duration of the relationship

-0.1\*\*

Emotional closeness to partner during sex

-0.3\*\*\*

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**Rating of present sexual enjoyment compared to 10 years ago in *men*** (Multiple regression analysis, standardized regression coefficients, weighted data)

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**Norway**

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**Structural factors**

Level of education

**Personal factors**

Age

Sexual activity throughout life

Health -0.2\*\*\*

**Interpersonal factors**

Duration of the relationship -0.2\*\*

Emotional closeness to partner during sex -0.1\*\*

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**Rating of present sexual enjoyment compared to 10 years ago in *women*** (Multiple regression analysis, standardized regression coefficients, weighted data)

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**Norway**

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**Structural factors**

Level of education

**Personal factors**

Age

Sexual activity throughout life

Health

**Interpersonal factors**

Duration of the relationship

-0.2\*\*

Emotional closeness to partner during sex

-0.3\*\*\*

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# Sexual problems



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**Percent men who have experienced sexual problems in the period of three months or longer  
in the past 12 months (weighted data, percent)**

	<b>Norway</b>
Lacked interest in having sex	20
Lacked enjoyment in sex	13
Felt anxious during sex	6
Felt physical pain as a result of sex	3
Felt no excitement or arousal during sex	14
Did not reach a climax or took a long time to reach a climax despite feeling excited	33
<b>Reached a climax more quickly than you would like</b>	38
<b>Had trouble getting or keeping an erection</b>	50

**Percent women who have experienced sexual problems in the period of three months or longer in the past 12 months (weighted data, percent)**

	<b>Norway</b>
<b>Lacked interest in having sex</b>	47
Lacked enjoyment in sex	30
Felt anxious during sex	6
Felt physical pain as a result of sex	19
Felt no excitement or arousal during sex	26
Did not reach a climax or took a long time to reach a climax despite feeling excited	47
Reached a climax more quickly than you would like	10
<b>Had an uncomfortable dry vagina</b>	40

## Number of sexual problems (%)

	Men		Women
<b>0</b>	30		31
<b>1</b>	26		26
<b>2</b>	20		15
<b>3</b>	13		13
<b>4</b>	6		7
<b>5</b>	4		5
<b>6 +</b>	1		4

## How distressful are sexual problems among men (%)

	No	Mild	Moderate	Serious
<b>Lacked interest</b>	38	29	28	6
<b>Lacked enjoyment</b>	33	33	23	11
<b>Anxious during sex</b>	8	35	48	9
<b>Physical pain during sex</b>	4	60	28	8
<b>No arousal</b>	18	43	30	9
<b>No orgasm/delayed orgasm</b>	29	44	23	4
<b>Premature ejaculation</b>	23	50	24	3
<b>Problems with erection</b>	11	34	41	14

**How distressful are sexual problems among Norwegian women (%)**

	None	Mild	Moderate	Serious
<b>Lacked interest</b>	52	29	17	2
<b>Lacked enjoyment</b>	30	33	31	6
<b>Anxious during sex</b>	18	34	42	5
<b>Physical pain during sex</b>	6	37	37	20
<b>No arousal</b>	26	38	28	8
<b>No orgasm/delayed orgasm</b>	31	44	20	5
<b>Premature ejaculation</b>	47	41	12	0
<b>Dry vagina</b>	5	42	37	16



## Sexual avoidance last year

	Men	Women
Never	59	33
Seldom	22	28
Sometimes	8	24
Often	5	6
Always/almost always	7	10

# Motives for avoiding sex among partnered men and women (%)

	Men	Women
Relationship problems	6	6
Fear of STIs	0	0
Sexual problems	20	10
Partner's sexual problems	24	19
Negative body image	0	3
Health problems	20	23
Not interested in sex anymore	7	11
Other	33	39

# Meeting health professionals



	Men	Women
<b>Percent having sought help for a sexual problem during the past 5 years</b>	12%	5%

## Reasons for seeking professional help for a sexual problem (%)

	Men	Women
<b>Sexual activity is important for me</b>	55	22
<b>Sexual activity is important for my relationship</b>	45	44
Partner wanted me to	7	12
<b>The change in my sex-life had a negative impact on how I felt</b>	20	18
<b>The change in my sex-life had a negative impact on our relationship</b>	13	9
I was afraid my partner would find a new sex partner	1	9
I was worried I would not be able to meet a new sex partner	7	3
Other reasons	13	21

Having been asked by health professionals  
about one's sex-life during the past 5 years

- **Men 15 %**
- **Women 11 %**



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**Use of lubricants and use of drugs like Viagra, Cialis, Levitra, or Spedra to assist sexual function in 60-75 year old men and women in Norway (%).**

	Men		Women	
Use of lubricants			31	
Use of medication	26			



**Use of medication such as Viagra, Cialis, Levitra or Spedra to assist sexual function, in 60-75 year old Norwegian men with and without erection difficulties (%).**

	<b>Erection difficulties</b>	<b>No erection difficulties</b>
<b>Use of medication</b>	42	11

# Non-consensual sexual experiences



### Experience of non-consensual sex during life in men

	Men
Never	94
Before the age of 18	4
After the age of 18	1.5
Before and after the age of 18	0.3

### Experience of non-consensual sex during life in women

	Women
Never	76
Before the age of 18	9
After the age of 18	11
Before and after the age of 18	4

# Experience of non-consensual sex before the age of 18

		Men		Women	
		%	AOR	%	AOR
<b>Age</b>					
60-64 years					
65-69 years					
70-65 years					
<b>Relationship status</b>					
No relationship		7***	1.0		
In a relationship		3	0.5**		
<b>Sexual orientation</b>					
Heterosexual		3***	1.0		
Non-heterosexual		13	4.6***		
<b>Religious affiliation</b>					
No				14**	1.0
Christian no denomin.					
Roman Catholic					
Protestant				8	0.5***
Other					
<b>Level of education</b>					
Primary					
Secondary					
Tertiary					
<b>Country</b>					
Norway				13**	1.0
Denmark					
Belgium				10	0.6*
Portugal				4	0.3***

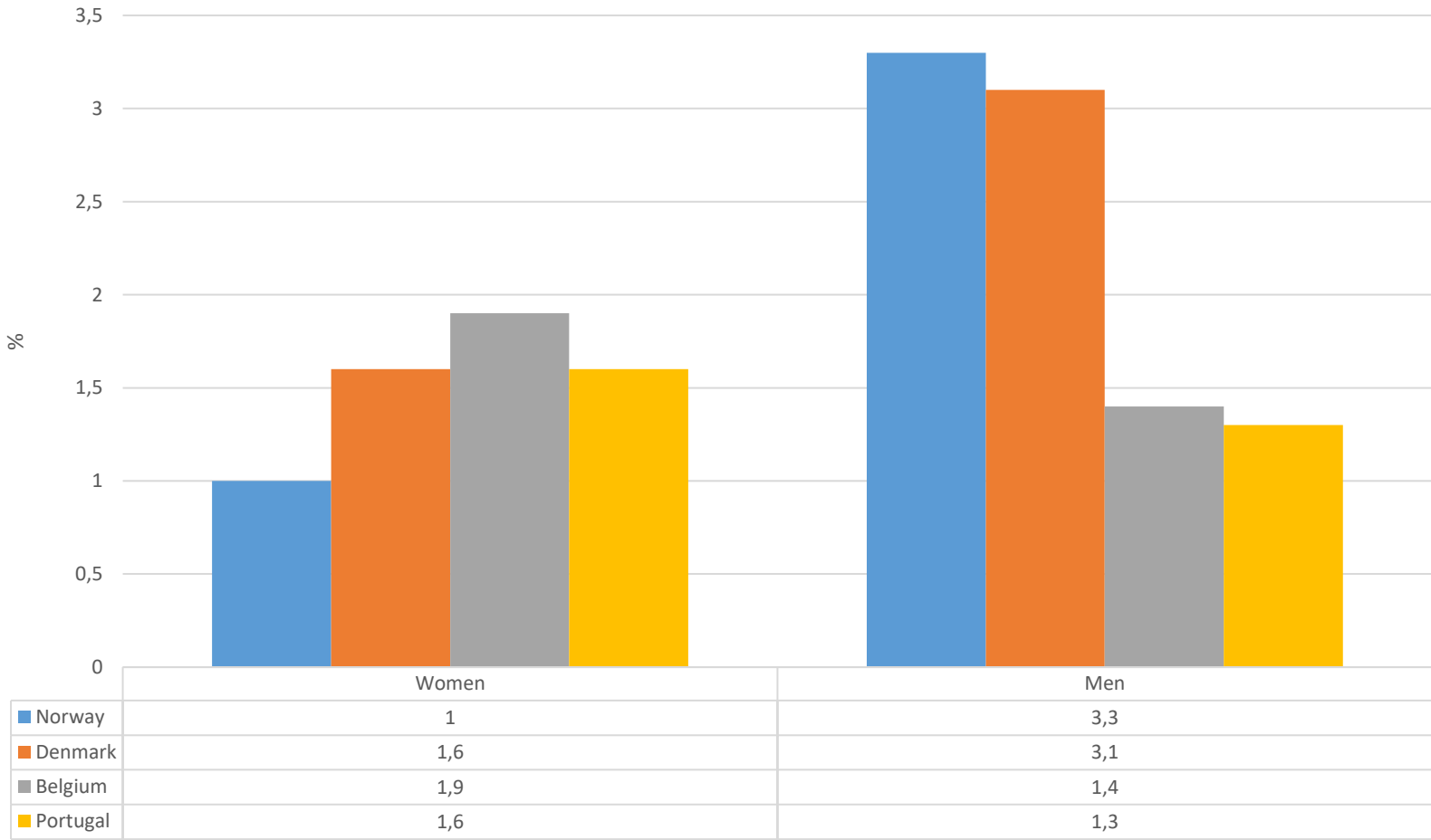
# Experience of non-consensual sex after the age of 18

		Men		Women	
		%	AOR	%	AOR
<b>Age</b>					
60-64 years					
65-69 years					
70-65 years					
<b>Relationship status</b>					
No relationship				16***	1.0
In a relationship				11	0.7**
<b>Sexual orientation</b>					
Heterosexual		2***	1.0		
Non-heterosexual		8	5.5***		
<b>Religious affiliation</b>					
No					
Christian no denomin.					
Roman Catholic					
Protestant					
Other					
<b>Level of education</b>					
Primary			1.0		1.0
Secondary					0.5**
Tertiary			0.2**		0.7*
<b>Country</b>					
Norway					
Denmark					
Belgium					
Portugal					

**Extradysc activity  
at the most recent  
sexual intercourse**



The person you had sex with most recently was NOT your current regular spouse or committed partner



### Extradynamic activity at the most recent sexual intercourse (AOR)

	Men			Women		
<b>Age</b>						
<b>Level of education</b>						
<b>Sexual activity throughout life</b>						
<b>Relationship happiness</b>	1.5	***				
<b>Perceived intimacy</b>				2.5	*	
<b>Partner has sexual difficulties</b>	0.7	*				
<b>Partners share the same sexual likes and dislikes</b>	2.5	***				
<b>Country</b>						
Norway different from Portugal	0.4	*				





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**Men and women 60-75 yrs in Norway who use the Internet for activities connected to love and sex (percent)**

<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>42</b>	<b>15</b>

**The use of internet for love and sexual activities (%).**

	Checking out dating sites to find a partner		Read or watch pornography		Buying sex products		Seeking sexual information or advice	
<i>Age</i>	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
60-64 years	6*		40***					
65-69 years	3		31					
70-75years	4		26					
<i>Number of times masturbated the past month</i>								
None		3***	13***	3***	7**	4***		4*
Monthly		7	36	5	9	7		7
Weekly or daily		4	63	16	13	12		7
<i>Country</i>								
Norway	4***	5***	39***		10*	4*	5***	4**
Denmark	3	2	32		8	6	3	2
Belgium	8	6	34		10	6	11	6
Portugal	1	2	13		4	1	10	7

# Conclusions

- **Most older adults are sexually active and satisfied**
  - **Sub-groups less sexually active and less sexually satisfied:**
    - 1) Women,
    - 2) Non-partnered individuals,
    - 3) Men and women over the age of 70 years; and
    - 4) Women with only primary education.
- Compared to 10 years ago, most older adults have unchanged or lower sexual interest and enjoyment
  - Health is the most important predictor of sexual interest and enjoyment in men
  - Feeling intimate with one's partner is the most important predictor of sexual interest and enjoyment in women
- Sexual problems are relatively widespread in older adults
- Few older adults seek help for sexual problems, and health personnel do not ask about it