Findings from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal)

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on behalf of the Natsal team
Sexual Health Brent, 8th May 2014

Content
- Background and history
- Methods
- Topics covered
- Focus on the association between health & sexual lifestyles
- Discussion

Background

The mid-1980s: Great concern & uncertainty about the spread of HIV/AIDS

Why Natsal?
- Only available data were from convenience studies & clinical samples
- Pilot probability sample survey demonstrated acceptability of a population survey of sexual behaviour

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- Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
- National Sexual Health Strategies
- National Chlamydia Screening Programme
- HPV vaccination programme
- HIV prevention
- Sex Education
- Legislation for age of homosexual consent
- Models disease transmission
- Social marketing
- Dispelling myths and challenging stereotypes...

- HPV vaccination
- Chlamydia screening
- HIV transmission
- And hopefully much, much more!
Natsal-3 team

Methods (Natsal-3)

Fieldwork

- 491 interviewers
- 15,162 participants interviewed in their homes (1 person per household)
- Interviewed using standardised questionnaires (CAPI/CASI)
- Age range 16-74

Fieldwork carried out by:

Representative sample

- Probability sampling methods (multi-stage, clustered, stratified design)
- Response rate of 58% (co-operation rate of 66%)
- Analysis weighted to be representative using Census 2011 data

Topics covered

- Marital status
- Ethnicity
- Self-reported general health

Note: Limited to ages 16-74; England & Wales only
Source: Natsal-3 Technical Report (page 41) available at www.natsal.ac.uk
Sexual health is a state of physical, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.

Source: www.who.int

Natsal-3: Adopting a broader, holistic view of sexual health

Headline results

Focus on Associations between health and sexual lifestyles in Britain

www.thelancet.com/themed/natsal

Associations between health and sexual lifestyles in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3)

Published online November 26, 2013 http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(13)62222-9
Objective

Hypothesis:
Poor health, disability, and a range of clinical conditions remain associated with measures of sexual lifestyles, after adjusting for age and relationship status

Rationale

• Few population surveys on health are specifically designed to measure sexual lifestyles
• Previous studies on sexual lifestyles have tended to include only a few measures of health
• Existing studies have focused on men or older people
• Natsal-3 sampled men and women from 16-74y, including extensive health questions for the first time

Measures of health

General
• Self-reported general health
• Disability/long-standing illness
• BMI

Physical function
• Stairs climbing ability

Specific conditions
• Cardiovascular, muscular-skeletal, mental health, prostate, and others

Measures of sexual lifestyles

1. Recent sexual activity (4 wks)
• ≥1 occasion of vaginal, oral or anal sex with opposite-sex partner, or oral or anal sex or genital contact with same-sex partner in past 4 weeks

2. Sexual satisfaction
• Thinking about sex life in past year, response to “I feel satisfied with my sex life”, using Likert scale

3. Self-assessment of health affecting sex life
• Health condition affecting sex life or enjoyment in the past year

4. Sexual response problems
• Sexual difficulties experienced for ≥6m in past year (erectile difficulties and vaginal dryness) – see web appendix

Key findings:

Self-assessed general health: Natsal-3 distribution compared with 2011 Census

Note: Limited to ages 16-74; England & Wales only
Source: Natsal-3 Technical Report (page 41) available at www.natsal.ac.uk
Measures of sexual lifestyles

1. Recent sexual activity
   • >=1 occasion of vaginal, oral or anal sex with opposite-sex partner, or oral or anal sex or genital contact with same-sex partner in past 4 weeks

Sexual satisfaction
• Thinking about sex life in past year, response to "I feel satisfied with my sex life", using Likert scale

Self-assessment of health affecting sex life
• Health condition affecting sex life or enjoyment in the past year
Recent sexual activity (past 4 wk) by sex and relationship status

Note: Limited to ages 16-74 reporting at least one sexual partner over the lifetime.
Source: Field et al. The Lancet. 2013. Table 2.

Recent sexual activity (past 4 wk) by age and sex

Adjusted odds ratio (AOR) adjusting for relationship status and self-reported general health

Note: Limited to ages 16-74 reporting at least one sexual partner over the lifetime.
Source: Field et al. The Lancet. 2013. Table 2.

Recent sexual activity by age, sex, and health status

Note: Limited to ages 16-74 reporting at least one sexual partner over the lifetime.
Source: Field et al. The Lancet. 2013. Figure.

 Associations between recent sex and general health measures, by sex

Adjusted for age & relationship status

Men

Women

Associations between recent sex and general health measures, by sex

Adjusted for age & relationship status

Men

Women
Associations between recent sex and general health measures, by sex

Adjusted for age & relationship status

Men

Women

Self-assessed health
Disability
Chronic conditions
BMI
Climbing stairs

Adjusted for age, comorbidity, relationship

Measures of sexual lifestyles

1. Recent sexual activity
   • ≥1 occasion of vaginal, oral or anal sex with opposite-sex partner, or oral or anal sex or genital contact with same-sex partner in past 4 weeks

2. Sexual satisfaction
   • Thinking about sex life in past year, response to “I feel satisfied with my sex life”, using Likert scale

3. Self-assessment of health affecting sex life
   • Health condition affecting sex life or enjoyment in the past year

Associations between recent sex and specific health conditions, by sex

Adjusted for age & relationship status

Men

Women

Associations between recent sex and specific health conditions, by sex

Adjusted for age, comorbidity, relationships

Measures of sexual lifestyles

1. Recent sexual activity
   • ≥1 occasion of vaginal, oral or anal sex with opposite-sex partner, or oral or anal sex or genital contact with same-sex partner in past 4 weeks

2. Sexual satisfaction
   • Thinking about sex life in past year, response to “I feel satisfied with my sex life”, using Likert scale

3. Self-assessment of health affecting sex life
   • Health condition affecting sex life or enjoyment in the past year

Associations between sexual satisfaction and general health, by sex

Adjusted for relationship status and self-reported general health

Satisfaction with sex life in past year, by age and sex

AOR adjusting for relationship status and self-reported general health

AOR adjusting for relationship status
Associations between sexual satisfaction and specific health conditions, by sex

Adjusted for age, comorbidity, relationships

Measures of sexual lifestyles

1. Recent sexual activity
   • ≥1 occasion of vaginal, oral or anal sex with opposite-sex partner, or oral or anal sex or genital contact with same-sex partner in past 4 weeks

2. Sexual satisfaction
   • Thinking about sex life in past year, response to “I feel satisfied with my sex life”, using Likert scale

3. Self-assessment of health affecting sex life
   • Health condition affecting sex life or enjoyment in the past year

Reporting of health conditions that affected an individual’s sex life in the past year, by age and sex

Adjusted for relationship status and self-reported general health

Associations between health conditions affecting sex life and general health, by sex

Adjusted for age & relationship status

Associations between health conditions affecting sex life and specific health conditions, by sex

Adjusted for age, comorbidity, relationships

Seeking help or advice from a health professional

Help seeking overall:
Men 7.0% (6.2-7.8)
Women 6.7% (6.1-7.4)

Note: Limited to ages 16-74 reporting at least one sexual partner over the lifetime
Source: https://natsal.ac.uk/media/823260/natsal_findings_final.pdf
Limitations:

• Relied on self-reported health, not able to undertake physical or biological measurements
• Did not measure partner health status
• Although wide age range, findings not generalisable to people older than 74y
• Health may have affected participation, and we were not able to sample residential or nursing homes
• Cross-sectional design unable to attribute directional causality

Key findings:

1. Poor health, chronic disability, and certain specific conditions were independently associated with decreased sexual activity and satisfaction (and increased sexual response problems) across the lifespan
2. Over one third of people in bad health reported recent sex, and around half were satisfied with their sex lives
3. 1 in 6 individuals said that their health had affected their sex life in the past year, strongly associated with reported ill health
4. This was seldom discussed with healthcare professionals

Health paper clinical and policy implications

• For patients and clinicians, sexual health matters across the life course
• Sexual lifestyle advice should be a component of holistic health care for patients with chronic ill health
• Future policy and planning of sexual health services need to ensure good sexual health at all ages

Thank you!

• Participants
• Interviewers
• Funders

…and to a fantastic team of friends and colleagues

Discussion

Further information

• www.natsal.ac.uk
• www.thelancet.com/themed/natsal
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