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## Sexuality and Aging among Older Men and Women in Nigeria as an Aspect of Sexual Health

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### **Abstract:**

*Sexual health is a critical issue in the United States as well as all over the nations. The sharing of sex in Nigeria is viewed as something meant for reproduction and for lustful passionate youths in the early years. This study investigates the fact concerning the sexual desires, feeling and the sexual experiences of older people, to ascertain if older people still have penetrative sex, reach orgasm and whether older people still enjoy pleasure of sexual activities and have satisfying sexual life like in their early forties or when they were in their earlier years of marriage. The study utilized a field survey to collect primary data. The target population was 200 men and women whose age were between 65-97 years and were either married, widowed single or have a current sexual partner. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to select both men and women. The questionnaire was validated; it has reliability co-efficient of 0.83. The instrument was a self-constructed questionnaire titled 'Sexuality and aging questionnaire'. It consists of three sections. Section A, B and C. Section A consist of demographic characteristics such as age, sex, religion, and marital status, level of education and partner status. Section B consist of items which sought information about whether respondents often discuss sex, have a current sexual partner, still have penetrative sex, enjoy the pleasure of sex. Section C dealt with the factors which could be responsible for elderly not to be having penetrative sex and the monthly and weekly frequency of penetrative sex among the elderly. The appropriate techniques such as Means, Percentages, Analysis of Variance, Scheffe Posthoc Analysis and T-test were used. The result of the findings shows the sexual behaviour and experiences of old people concerned with their sexuality. Appropriate recommendation was made concerning the improvement of sexual health of the elderly.*

**Keywords:** Sexuality, aging sexual health, older years, Sexual response

### **1. Introduction**

The sharing of sex is usually viewed as something for lustful passionate youths and the earlier years of marriage. In our youth-oriented culture such as in Nigeria, being old is equated with giving up sex. Yet studies have revealed that the elderly are indeed sexual beings. Older people not only retain sexual desire but enjoy the pleasure of the same sexual activities they knew as younger people. Sometimes older people apparently even enjoy sexual activities more than younger people (Jacoby, 1999; Lacy, 2002; National Council on Aging, 1998) Lacy (2002) observed that cross-cultural studies demonstrate that in the majority of societies, continuation of sexual activities is expected to have much, if any, loss of their sexual capabilities until they were very old, and women are also expected to maintain their sexual interest and activities. In fact, women frequently reported signs of stronger sexual interest and fewer inhibition towards discussing sex after they had passed their childbearing years (Lacy, 2002) Pattern of sexual activities varies greatly among the elderly. Cultural and social expectations of sexual behaviour as well as the state of health of both partners may play a part in the frequency and type of sexual activity engaged in by elderly couple.

Jacoby (1999) reported that a survey of 1,604 people aged 65-97 years found that 52% of the male and 30% of the female indicated they were still sexually active. They engaged in sexual activities on the average of 2.5 times per month, although they would have preferred to have sex about twice that amount. During their previous 10 sexual experiences the men reached orgasm at an average of 80% of the times, and the women about 50% (Mark Clements, Research 1996) Another study of people over the age of 45 found that about two third were extremely or very satisfied with their sexual relationships. A survey conducted with 1,292 people in their sixties, seventies and eighties by the National Council on Aging (1998) confirmed that about half had sexual activities at least once a month, and 70% of those who were sexually active indicated that their sex lives were at least satisfying as it had been when they were in their forties.

Mark Clement research, (1996) reported that psychological stress, a number of illness, and diminishing desire are some of the factors which could be responsible for decline in sexual interest and behavior as people as they age. Several other factors such as seeing Sex as an important part of one's life or letting sex becomes a low priority of life may

determine sexual interest. Other factors, which may determine the level of sexuality in older years include, partner availability, sexual value, knowledge about sexuality (Claamidas, 1997).

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

The Sharing of sex is usually viewed as something for lustful and passionate youth and for early years of marriage. In youth-oriented culture such as in Nigeria, being old is equated with giving up sex. Studies have revealed that elderly are indeed sexual beings. However, people seem to wonder whether loving and sexual feelings are experienced by older men. It seems people believe that sex is primarily, for reproduction in Nigeria, when women are more likely to be viewed as becoming less attractive with aging. Many sex-negative myths and attitudes add up to policies or attitudes that prohibit sexual expression among the aged.

It has been observed in the homes and other institutions that provide care for older men and women that the expression of sexual interest is seen as inappropriate and therefore discouraged. There seem to be a lack of privacy for a sort of personal or shared sexual activity, however, many elderly people in nursing home remain sexually active. In most cases attitudes of people seem to be negative toward older adult's sexuality and it seems there is lack of support for the sexuality of older people. Hence opportunity to encourage older people's sexuality are usually hindered. There is a need to provide older people with opportunities for choice and sense of personal autonomy to enhance sexual identity and adjustment. It is assumed that older people have lost their sense of sexual feelings needs and sexual behaviour. This study therefore, is to investigate the following facts concerning the sexual life of older years. To be able to guide this study, there is need to investigate the following

- What are the facts concerning the sexual life of older years
- How often do older people have penetrate sexual intercourse?
- For older people who do not have sex, which factors are responsible for their choice or the reason for not having sexual intercourse?

### 1.2. Hypotheses

- Age of elderly people would not determine whether they have sexual feelings
- Gender of elderly people does not determine their level of pleasure of sexual activities.
- Marital status of elderly people will not be related to their level of sexual pleasure or whether they have satisfactory sexual life
- Partner status, that is whether the partner is alive or dead does not determine whether elderly people have sexual feeling
- Religion of the elderly people does not determine whether they enjoy satisfactory sexual life.

## 2. Methodology

The study utilized a field survey to collect primary data. The target population was 200 men and women whose age were between 65-97 years and were either married, widowed, single or have a current sexual partner. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling to select both men and women. The questionnaire was validated; it has a reliability co-efficient of 0.83.

The instrument was a self-constructed questionnaire titled 'Sexuality and Aging Questionnaire'. It consists of three sections. Section A, B and C. Section A consist of demographic characteristics such as age, sex, religion, and marital status, level of education and partner status. Section B consist of items which sought information about whether respondents often discuss sex, have a current sexual partner, still have penetrative sex, enjoy the pleasure of sex. Section C dealt with the factors which could be responsible for elderly not to be having penetrative sex and monthly, weekly, frequency of penetrative sex among the elderly. The appropriate techniques such as means percentages, Analysis of variance, Scheffe Posthoc analysis and t-test were used

## 3. Result

### 3.1. Descriptive Analysis

- Question 1: What are the facts concerning the sexual life of older years

		Yes	%	No	%
1	Do older people still have penetrative as in their early forties	76	38	124	62
2	Do older people enjoy the pleasure of sexual activities	64	32	136	68
3	Is the sexual life of older people satisfying	67	33.5	133	66.5
4	Do older people have inhibition towards discussing sex	52	26	148	74.5
5	Do older people reach orgasm in old age				

Table 1: Fact Concerning the Sexual Life of Older Years

Table 1: Shows that a very high percentage, 74.5% of elderly people still reach orgasm in old

A very high percentage of elderly people do not have penetrative sex like in their early years 68% no longer enjoy the pleasure of sexual activities like in their early years, a love percentage 33.5% reported, that their sexual life is not as satisfying as it was in their earlier years.

91% reported that they have inhibition towards discussing sex after they had passed child bearing. These finding shows that older people's sexual activities could not be compared to what it was in their early years.

- Question 2: How often do older people have penetrative sex?

<b>Frequency of Penetrative Sexual Intercourse by Older People</b>				
	Yes	%	No	%
Do you still have sex?	54	27	146	73

Table 2: Table Showing the Frequency Percentages of Older People's Level of Penetrative Sex

Table 2 above shows, that 27% reported that they are still having penetrative sex, while 73% no longer have penetrative sex. A higher percentage of older people no longer have penetrative sex.

- How often does elderly have sex?

<b>How Often Elderly Have Sex</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Rarely	106	53
Not often	30	15
Frequently	30	15
Constantly	27	18
	200	100%

Table 3: Frequency of Penetrative Sex by Elderly

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Once	41	20.5
Twice	41	23.5
Thrice	5	2.5
Four times	5	2.5
Total	200	100%

Table 4: Weekly Frequency of Penetrative Sex

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Between 1-5 times	83	41.5
Between 6-10 times	14	7

Table 5: Monthly Frequency Penetrative Sex

The tables above table 3, 4 and 5 shows the frequency of penetrative sex by elderly 18% have penetrative sex constantly. 15% frequently while 15% have sex not frequently and 53% rarely have sex.

Table 4: Shows that 20.59% elderly have sex once a week, 23.5% twice a week, 2.5% have penetrative sex three or four times weekly

Table 5 shows that 41.5% elderly have penetrative sex between 1-5 times while 7% have penetrative sex between 6-10 times monthly

- Question 3: What are the reasons why some elderly does not have sex

	<b>Reason why some elders are not having sex</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
a	Penetrative sex is for passionate youth	66	33	134	67
b	Physiological Changes and illness	54	27	147	73
c	Lack of sexual partner	26	13	174	87
d	Lack of sexual interest	46	23	154	77
e	The belief that old people should not have penetrative sex	42	21	156	79
f	Lack of Erection or sexual stimulation	38	19	162	81
g	Medication	26	13	174	87

Table 6: Showing the Reasons Why Elderly Is Not Having Penetrative Sex

A higher percentage of the elderly do not agree that penetrative sex is for youths, and that lack of sexual interest or sexual partner, lack of sexual stimulation or physiological changes illness or medication is responsible for their not having penetrative sex However about a third of the population 33% and 21% reported that penetrative sexual contact and physiological changes and illness are the reasons why they avoid penetrative sex.

- Hypothesis 1: Age of elderly people would not determine whether they have sexual feeling

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between Groups	202.412	2	101.206		
Within Groups	2582.463	197	13.109	7.720	.001
Total	2784.875	199			

Table 7: ANOVA of Elderly People's Sexual Feeling by Age

\* $p < 0.05$ 

Table 1 shows that age of elderly people would determine whether they sexual feeling ( $F_{2,197} = 7.720$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected. The result of Scheffe Posthoc test is presented in Table 8.  $F_{2,197} = 7.720$

Age	1	2	3	N	Mean	SD
65-70		*	*	84	17.0952	3.90742
71-80				77	15.6494	3.06837
81 and above				39	14.4615	3.97258

Table 8: Scheffe Posthoc Analysis of Elderly Peoples' Sexual Feeling by Age

\* $p < 0.05$ 

Table 8 reveals that there is significant difference between elderly peoples. Sexual feeling who are between 65-70years and 71-80years. Similarly, the mean difference between the sexual feeling of those who are between 65-70years and 81years and above is statistically significant at 005 level. However, there is no statistical significant difference between sexual feeling of elderly of aged 71-80years and 81 years and above at 0.05 level. The result further shows that sexual feeling of elderly decreases with ageing

- Hypothesis2: Gender of elderly people does not determine their level of pleasure or sexual activities.

Sex	N	Mean	SD	df	t	P
Male	70	16.7286	3.11109			
				198	1.966	0.05
Female	130	15.6462	3.99973			

Table 9: t Test Showing Elderly People's Level of Sexual Pleasure by Gender

\* $p < 0.05$ 

Table 9 Shows that gender of elderly people determines their level of pleasure or sexual activities ( $t = 1.966$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected.

- Hypothesis 3: Marital status of elderly people will not be related to their level of sexual pleasure or whether they have satisfactory sexual life.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between Groups	290.816	4	72.704		
Within Groups	2494.059	195	12.790	5.684*	.000
Total	2784.875	199			

Table 10: ANOVA Showing Elderly Peoples' Level of Sexual Pleasure by Marital

\* $P < 0.05$ 

Table 10 shows that marital status of elderly people will be related to their level of sexual pleasure or whether they have satisfactory sexual life ( $F_{4,195} = 5.684$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is rejected. The result of Scheffe Posthoc analysis of elderly peoples' sexual life based on marital status is presented in table 5.

Marital Status	1	2	3	4	5	N	Mean	SD
Married (1)			*			85	17.0952	3.90742
Single (2)			*			12	18.6667	2.14617
Widowed (3)						83	15.0000	3.55788
Divorced (4)						11	14.7273	3.13340
Separated (5)						9	14.4444	.52705

Table 11: Scheffe Posthoc Analysis of Elderly Peoples' Sexual Life by Marital

\* $p < 0.05$ 

The result in Table 11 shows that there is significant difference between the sexual pleasure of married and widowed elderly people at 0.05 level of significance. Also, the mean difference between the sexual pleasure of single and widowed is statistically significant at 0.05 level.

- Hypothesis 4: Partner status, that is, whether the partner is alive or dead does not determine whether elderly people have sexual feeling.

Partner's Status	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Alive	106	17.4528	3.71902			
				198	6.257*	0.000
Dead	94	14.4149	3.06352			

Table 12: *t*-test Summary of Elderly Peoples Sexual Feeling by Partners' Status

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 12 shows that partner status, that is, whether the partner is alive or dead determine whether elderly people have sexual feeling ( $t=6.257$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

The null hypothesis is rejected.

- Hypothesis 5: Religion of the elderly people does not determine whether they enjoy satisfactory sexual life.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between Groups	37.935	2	18.967		
Within Groups	2746.940	197	13.944	1.360	.259
Total	2784.875	199			

Table 13: *T*-Test of Elderly Peoples' Sexual Life by Religion

\* $P > 0.05$

Table 13 reveals that religion of the elderly people does not determine whether they enjoy satisfactory sexual life ( $F_{2,197}=1.360$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis is not rejected.

#### 4. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this research shows that age of elderly people would determine their sexual feelings. This shows that sexual feelings of the elderly decreases with age. This finding is contrary to that of Jacob by (1999), lacy (2002) and the Nation Council on Aging (1998) who reported that older people not only retain sexual desire but enjoy the pleasure of the same sexual activities they knew as younger people. This finding might be so because psychological stress, a number of illness and dismissing desire are some of the factors which could be responsible for the decline in sexual interest and behavior as people age.

Findings shows that 15% the elderly have penetrative sex frequently 18% have sex constantly and 53% rarely have sex. Most elderly people 20.5% have sex once a week 23.5% twice a week while 2.5% have sex three and four times weekly. The findings show that 41.5 elderly have penetrative sex between 1-5 times a month while 7% have penetrative sex between 6-10 times a month.

This shows that the elderly not only retain sexual desire, but still enjoy the pleasure of same sexual activities they know as younger people. This shows that the sexual lives of old people are as satisfying as it was in the earlier years. The result of hypothesis 2 shows that the gender of the elderly would determine their level of sexual pleasure. This finding agrees with that of lack (2002) who reported that women frequently report signs of stronger sexual interest and fewer inhibition towards discussing sex after they had passed their child bearing years. This might be so because the continuation of sexual activities is expected to be less as women grow old, Women according to the Nigerian culture are not expected to maintain their sexual interest or activities as they become old, hypothesis 3 shows there is a significant difference in the sexual pleasure or married, widowed or single. This finding agrees with that of Claamidas (1997) who reported that factors which could influence the level of sexual pleasure are party's availability, sex values; Being widowed or single which equated with giving away sex. It is expected that a widow who has lost his or her partner should have lost sexual interest and hence low sexual pleasure since the available of a partner could be a problem.

The findings show that whether a partner is alive or dead would determine whether as an elderly sexual feeling. This finding agrees with Claamidas (1997) who observed that partner availability is a factor in sexual feelings This is because the sexual feelings output might be affected if the partner is not available or dead.

#### 5. Conclusion

Old people still have sexual feelings and could still experience a satisfactory sexual life, However, their sexual feeling could decrease with age. Many old people could still experience orgasm if partners are available. The sexual life could still be satisfactory if the opportunity is available. Factors which are responsible for their not having sex should be addressed. Such factors such as physiological changes and illness. Other means of sexual pleasure such as non-penetrative sexual activities like kissing and hugging should be encouraged among elderly people. The sharing of sex should no longer be viewed as something for lustful passionate youths in their early years alone. People should no longer show negative attitude to old people's sexuality, opportunity to encourage old people's sexuality should not be hindered. Old people are sexual beings

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