

Research Paper

Relationship Between Sexual Satisfaction and Mental Health in Married Older Women



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ABSTRACT

Background The aging population is increasing rapidly; therefore, paying attention to the needs of older people is necessary. Sexual satisfaction, which is needed to feel happy, is often neglected in older women.

Objective This study aims to evaluate the relationship between sexual satisfaction and mental health in older women.

Materials and Methods In this analytical study with a cross-sectional design, 195 married women aged ≥60 years covered by urban and rural health centers of Guilan, Iran were recruited using a cluster sampling method. A demographic form, the 28-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) and a Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire were completed by participants and collected data were analyzed in SPSS v. 22 software using descriptive statistics (frequency, mean, standard deviation, median), and Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis and Spearman correlation tests.

Results There was a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and mental health in older women ($P < 0.0001$). 51.2%, 27.7% and 21.08% of participants had low, moderate and high sexual satisfaction, respectively. Sexual satisfaction was directly related to monthly income ($P < 0.0001$) and women's and their husbands' education ($P < 0.0001$ and 0.006) while it was inversely related to physical illness ($P = 0.030$), medication use ($P = 0.009$), age ($P < 0.0001$), number of children ($P = 0.022$), and duration of marriage ($P < 0.0001$). The median score of mental health in participants was 38 (ranging 24-53) and the percentage of participants with mental problems (79.4%) was higher than those without mental problems (20.6%).

Conclusion Mental health and sexual satisfaction in older women are directly related to each other; therefore, providing effective and appropriate sexual care programs is recommended for them.

Keywords:

Sexual satisfaction, Mental health, Elderly, Married women

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

About two-thirds of the aging population are currently living in developing countries which is estimated to be 14% in Iran and is expected to reach about 30% in 2050. One of the most important health issues related to the elderly is sexual health so that old couples have a healthy sexual relationship with desirable physical, mental and behavioral conditions, indicating a kind of love and affection in marital life. Mental health plays a key role in older women's sexual desires, and higher levels of sexual activity have been associated with better physical health, and higher sexual satisfaction associated with better mental health and higher communication quality. Considering the increasing aging population in Iran and their life expectancy, having knowledge of the sexual satisfaction and mental health statuses of older women can help adopt health policies to develop educational, medical and recreational programs for this age group and provide the ground for more studies. Most of studies in the field of sexual satisfaction, especially in Iran, have been conducted on the age groups other than elderly groups and their results are contradictory. This study aims to determine the relationship between sexual satisfaction and mental health in older women living in Iran.

2. Materials and Methods

In this cross-sectional study, 195 married women aged ≥ 60 years covered by urban and rural health centers of Guilan, Iran in 2019 were selected by a cluster sampling method. The sample size was determined by performing a pilot study on 20 participants using the Cochran's formula and considering a design effect of 1.5. Inclusion criteria were age ≥ 60 years and being covered by urban and rural health centers in Guilan province. Exclusion criterion was having serious cognitive or psychiatric disorders. For sampling, with the cooperation of the provincial health center, 5 urban health centers and 5 rural health centers in Guilan were first randomly selected. Then, during a Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-5 was conducted to assess the existence of any serious cognitive or psychiatric disorders in women. Then, eligible individuals willing to participate in the study signed a written informed consent form and were asked to complete a demographic form, the Persian version of the 28-item general health questionnaire. (GHQ-28), and a sexual satisfaction questionnaires. The collected data were analyzed in SPSS v. 22 software using descriptive statistics (Frequency, mean, standard deviation), and Shapiro-Wilk, Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis and Spearman correlation tests.

3. Results

Demographic characteristics of participants are shown in [Table 1](#). Of 195 participants, 166 (85.1%) had active sexual intercourse in the past year. Their mean score of sexual satisfaction was 3.5 (ranging 2-6); 51.2% had low sexual satisfaction, 27.7% were with moderate sexual satisfaction, and 21.08% with high sexual satisfaction. Moreover, 79.4% had some degree of mental health problem, and the percentage of those with illness was higher than those with no illness. There was a significant relationship between mental health and educational level of older women ($P=0.007$) and their husbands ($P=0.003$). In participants with an income less than 1,500,000 Tomans ($P\leq 0.0001$), physical illness ($P=0.011$) and use of certain medications ($P\leq 0.001$), the mean score of GHQ-28 was significantly higher. The factor of place of residence had no significant relationship with sexual satisfaction and mental health of older women. Sexual satisfaction score had a significant relationship with age ($P\leq 0.0001$), number of children ($P=0.022$) and duration of marriage ($P\leq 0.0001$). The mental health had a significant direct relationship with age ($P\leq 0.0001$), duration of marriage ($P=0.002$), and number of children ($P=0.012$) such that with the increase of age, duration of marriage, and number of children, the score of GHQ-28 increased significantly. The age gap between spouses had no significant relationship with sexual satisfaction and mental health. The results of Spearman correlation test indicated a significant negative relationship between mental health and sexual satisfaction ($r= 0.542, P\leq 0.0001$).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, sexual satisfaction in older women living in Iran is related to their psychological, social and physical conditions. Older people need sex like other people, and it seems better to shift the focus from their sexual activity to their sexual satisfaction. Researchers involved in geriatric medicine need to be aware of the importance of sexual behavior in older women, which has been largely neglected. This study and many similar studies answer some of the questions raised in the field of sexual issues in the elderly. However, many questions remain unanswered. For example, is the sexual satisfaction of older women necessary for their sexual activity and orgasm? Are the older women really satisfied with their sex life or have just simply accepted it? Further studies can answer these questions. Health policies can be helpful by monitoring and paying attention to sexual issue of older women.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variable		No. (%)
Place of residence	Urban areas	101 (51.8)
	Rural areas	94 (48.2)
Education	Illiterate	91 (46.7)
	Without high school diploma	70 (35.9)
	With high school diploma	27 (13.8)
	Higher education	7 (3.6)
Husband's education	Illiterate	71 (36.4)
	Without high school diploma	81 (41.5)
	With high school diploma	30 (15.4)
	Higher education	13 (6.7)
Number of children	1-3	60 (30)
	4-7	122 (65.3)
	≥ 8	5 (2.6)
Monthly income (Tomans)	≤ 1,500,000	140 (71.8)
	1,500,000 - 3,000,000	54 (27.7)
	≥ 3,000,000	1 (0.5)
History of substance abuse	Yes	6 (3.1)
History of physical illness	Yes	168 (86.5)
Medication use	Yes	162 (85.8)

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Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

This study was approved by the Research Ethics committee of Guilan University of Medical Sciences (Code: IR.GUMS.REC.1395.353).

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Authors' contributions

All authors equally contributed to preparing this article.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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