INTRODUCTION

Recent research started exploring the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on sex life (Feng et al., 2020; Lehmiller et al., 2020). Some people refrain from casual sex due to fear of COVID-19, while social distancing prevents non-cohabitating couples from sex (Hensel et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). Pandemic-related stress, anxiety, and depression often negatively affect sexual desire and intimacy (Brooks et al., 2020; De Rose, 2020; Ross et al., 2020). Other people may have more sex and seek connection with another human being as a coping mechanism with anxiety and stress (Dewitte et al., 2020; Gillespie et al., 2021).

These inclinations may manifest differently across various ages. However, there is a dearth of research on age differences in the impacts of COVID-19 on sex life:

- Only two studies alluding to age (among other variables) at the nexus of COVID-19 and sex (De Rose, 2020; Ruskin, 2020).
- Further research is needed to clarify the impacts of COVID-19 on sexual health and wellbeing across the lifespan.

AIM

To examine potential age differences in the overall adjustment and resilience to the impacts of COVID-19 and associated prevention measures on sexual health.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection


Participants

Sample (N = 565 participants)

- Gender: 377 women, 166 men, 17 other
- Age range: 18-76 years old, 3 categories:
  - Young adulthood (18-30yo) – 61%
  - Middle adulthood (31-50yo) – 31%
  - Late(r) adulthood (51+yo) – 8%
- Race/ethnicity: 402 white, 91 Asian, 23 Hispanic, 20 Black participants.
- Relationship status: 345 in relationship, 181 not in relationship.

Measurement

- Ability to adjust to COVID-19’s conditions measured with 5-point scale (from “Extremely well” to “Extremely poorly”).
- Impacts of COVID-19 on sex life measured with 5-point scale (from “Deteriorated a lot” to “Improved a lot”).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics One-way ANOVA

RESULTS

Ability to adjust to COVID-19

18-30yo to 51+yo

51+yo were adjusting better than any other group (F(2,553) = 6.320, p = .002)

RESILIENCE TO COVID-19’S IMPACTS ON SEX LIFE

Changes in sexual desire

31-50yo to 18-30yo

Sexual desire deteriorated the worst among 31-50yo (F(2,543) = 9.140, p = .000)

Changes in physical sexual difficulties

51+yo to 18-30yo

Difficulties worsened most among 51+yo, with 31-50yo following them (F(2,300) = 4.213, p = .016)

Changes in sexual attraction

18-30yo to 31-50yo

Attraction improved among 18-30yo but not the other two groups (F(2,413) = 11.076, p = .000)

Changes in quality and diversity of sex life

18-30yo to 31-50yo

CONCLUSIONS

Despite older adults being at highest risk for complications from COVID-19, they were adjusting better than other age groups.

Regarding the impacts of COVID-19 on sex life, this study reveals both differences and similarities across the lifespan:

- Age differences in the impacts of pandemic on sexual desire, physical sexual difficulties, and sexual attraction.
- No age differences in the impacts of pandemic on the perceived quality and diversity of sex life.

Sexual desire deteriorated the most in middle adulthood; likely, due to increased childcare responsibilities. Changes in physical sexual difficulties during pandemic were most pronounced in later life; perhaps, due to older adults being more vulnerable in this area.

This study provides age-specific insights for sexual counseling and age-targeted sexual health education during the pandemic.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Brianna Silveira: bls4@illinois.edu
Liza Berdychevsky: lizabk@illinois.edu

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