

Abstract

Over the past two decades, numerous studies have revealed and documented that sex remains an integral part of older individuals' lives, affecting their physical and psychological well-being, as well as their overall life satisfaction. Despite this growing interest, there is a scarcity of qualitative research regarding sexuality and aging from the subjective perspective of older individuals, particularly in non-Western cultures. To fill this gap in the literature, the aim of the presented doctoral dissertation was to explore the narratives of Polish older adults regarding their sexual history, sexual experiences at present, and their sexual expectations.

The research was informed by the bio-psycho-social perspective on sexuality and Simon and Gagnon's sexual scripts theory, and conducted by carrying out 30 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Polish women and men aged between 65 and 82. Qualitative analysis of the collected data adhered to the Braun & Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis method.

The presented doctoral dissertation took the form of a series of articles that were published in peer-reviewed academic journals, and includes the following:

Article 1: Gore-Gorszewska, G. (2021). What do You Mean by "Sex"? A Qualitative Analysis of Traditional versus Evolved Meaning of Sexual Activity among Older Women and Men. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 58(8), 1035-1049.

Article 2: Gore-Gorszewska, G., & Ševčíková, A. (2022). Trajectories of intimacy in later-life: a qualitative study of Czech and Polish narratives. *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*, 1-16.

Article 3: Gore-Gorszewska, G. (2021). „Why Would I Want Sex Now?” A qualitative study on older women's affirmative narratives on sexual inactivity in later life. *Ageing and Society*, 1-25.

The first article sought to clarify the understanding of "sex" among older adults and its impact on their sexual attitudes and behaviors. Building on this, the second article delved deeper into the subject of sexual intimacy in later life, through the description of the sexual life trajectories that emerged in the respondents' narratives, as well as reference to the socio-cultural factors dominant during the participants' youth. The third article focused specifically on the phenomenon of sexual inactivity among older women, aiming to identify and nuance a range of reasons for the discontinuation of sexual activity in later life.

The findings discussed in the dissertation contribute to the current literature on psycho-social mechanisms concerning sexuality in later life by providing insights from older women and men with a specific socio-cultural background. The study clarifies the various meanings of sex among older adults and their implications for sexual attitudes and behaviors in later life. Moreover, it describes life trajectories related to intimacy, identifies life events that may alter attitudes and perceptions towards sex, and advances the scientific understanding of factors linked to the cessation of sexual activity in older age. These results may have both theoretical and practical implications, particularly in clinical practice with aging individuals and in educational programs related to sexual health and well-being in later life.