

The Sexual Well-Being of Adults with ASDs

Summary of Results

October 2010

Thank you for participating in the *Adults with ASDs Sexual Well-being* study. As you may recall, the goal of the study was to increase our understanding of the sexual functioning of adults living in the community with self-reported high-functioning autism spectrum disorders (ASDs).

The Participants

We had two groups of people completing the survey. One group included participants who *have never been* in a romantic relationship. The other group included participants who had been in a romantic relationship in the past or were currently in a romantic relationship. This summary only includes this second group as we are still reviewing the findings for participants who had never been in a romantic relationship.

In total, 101 women and 167 men who were in a romantic relationship at the time of the study or had been in a romantic relationship in the past completed the survey. Fifty-three percent of participants reported that they had been diagnosed with an autism spectrum diagnosis by a medical or mental health professional. The sample was highly educated in that 61% had completed an undergraduate or graduate degree. Most participants were living in the United States (51%), Australia/New Zealand (22%), or the United Kingdom (11%).

Many participants were living with a spouse (44%), fiancé (4%) or boyfriend/girlfriend (6%). Only a minority were living with their parents (8%), or in a supported living arrangement (3%); 22% were living alone. Most participants identified themselves as either heterosexual (69%) or bisexual (13%).

Overall Sexual Well-Being

We assessed a wide range of aspects of sexual well-being. Generally, participants reported good sexual functioning. That is, on average, participants reported moderate sexual satisfaction, sexual arousability, sexual desire for partnered sexual activities and sexual desire for solitary sexual activities. Their sexual self-esteem was *neither positive nor negative* and participants *rarely to sometimes* experienced sexual problems. On average, individuals reported engaging in sexual activity with a partner two to three times in the last month and engaging in solitary sexual activity once a week on average.

Potential Factors Affecting Sexual Well-Being

We were also interested in finding out whether a number of factors were associated with sexual well-being including gender, age, relationship status, and ASDs symptomatology.

In terms of gender, we found that compared to the male participants, women tended to report lower sexual well-being in a number of areas. This included lower sexual arousability, lower desire for sex with a partner, less frequent sexual thoughts, lower desire for solitary sexual activity, less frequent solitary sexual activity, and more sexual problems.

Participants ranged in age from 21 to 73 years. For the most part, age was not associated with sexual functioning. However, older individuals reported less frequent sexual activity with a partner than did younger individuals.

About two thirds of participants (66%) indicated that they were currently in a romantic relationship; the other third had been in a romantic relationship in the past. We compared these two groups. Individuals with a current partner tended to report greater sexual satisfaction, greater sexual self-esteem, greater sexual assertiveness, and more frequent dyadic sexual activity.

Finally, we found that, on average, people with more autistic characteristics reported poorer sexual well-being. This included lower sexual satisfaction, lower sexual self-esteem, lower sexual assertiveness, lower sexual arousability, and greater sexual anxiety.

Thank You for Supporting Our Research

We hope that you enjoyed participating in our study. We really appreciate the time you spent completing our survey. The information you provided has helped us better understand the sexuality well-being of adults with ASDs who live in the community. This data has already been presented at the International Association for Autism Research's 2010 conference and we are currently preparing the first of several research manuscripts.

Thanks for taking the time to share your views with us! If you have any questions about this study, please contact us, Dr. Sandra Byers (byers@unb.ca; (506) 458-7697) at the Department of Psychology, University of New Brunswick or Dr. Shana Nichols (drshananichols@gmail.com; (631) 923-0923).