SEX AND SEXAGENARIANS

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Objectives: To: (i) describe the change sexual function of women in their 6th decade; (ii) determine the prevalence of sexual distress (and sexual dysfunction) and (iii) the factors associated with and predictive of sexual distress in a population-based sample of mid-aged Australian-born women.

Design & Method: 11-year prospective study of Australian-born women, aged 45–55 years and menstruating at baseline. Validated measure of sexual function (the Personal Experiences Questionnaire [SPEQ] was completed in years 1 to 8 and 11 of follow-up and in the 11th follow-up year the Female Sexual Distress Scale (FSDS). A Total Sex Score of ≤ 7 from the SPEQ is indicative of low sexual function and a score of ≥ 15 on the FSDS represents significant sexual distress.

Results: 257 women were interviewed in the 11th year of follow-up. There was a significant decline in all domains of sexual function in the decade studied; women using hormone therapy in year 11 had significantly greater responsivity and higher frequency of sexual activities. 204 women completed both the FSDS and SPEQ questionnaires. 166 (82%) women had an SPEQ score of ≤ 7 of whom 37 (18%) had an FSDS score of ≥ 15 and were classified as having female sexual dysfunction. Logistic regression analysis found that female sexual distress was concurrently associated with higher depression scores (OR 1.31, 95% CI 1.10, 1.56) and more negative Feelings for Partner (OR 0.49, 95% CI 0.32, 0.76) and was predicted by prior negative Feelings for Partner (OR 0.31, 95% CI 0.14, 0.70) and a greater decline in Total Sex Score (OR 0.77, 95% CI 0.59, 0.99).

Conclusions: Chronological aging and hormonal levels have negative effects on sexual function. Only a minority of mid-aged postmenopausal women are distressed about low sexual function. Sexual distress is associated with depression and relationship factors.