

Factors Of Sexual Health, Sexual Function, And Sexual Satisfaction Of Married Adults: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Sexual health is a state of sexual well-being and not just the absence of dysfunctions. Sexual function and satisfaction are two important components of human functioning. This paper aims to analyze the literature on factors of sexual health, sexual function, and sexual satisfaction of married adults for decades to understand the paradigm shift in this area. A systematic and methodological search found relevant studies from 2005 to 2020 from major databases with predetermined criteria. The systematic review adopted the framework of scoping review. It found that sexual health, sexual function, and sexual satisfaction are influenced positively or negatively by bio-psycho-social and cultural factors, that were either intrapersonal which includes factors within the individual, or interpersonal, which includes factors that occur between couples, or environmental, which includes extrinsic and peripheral determinants of the individual. The review implies the need of understanding various factors of sexual health, function, and satisfaction in various cultural contexts. Also indicate the need for in-depth gender-specific studies in this area with a deep focus on each kind of factor, as the factors are varying among male and females.

Keywords: Sexual health, sexual function, sexual satisfaction, sexuality, married adults

Introduction

World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as a state of complete well-being and not merely the absence of any illness or disease (WHO, 2020). The concept of health is very broad and intensive as it includes various components such as physical, mental, spiritual, social, environmental, sexual, reproductive, occupational, etc. A person's overall health includes well-being in all components and is influenced by several factors. In this paper, the concept of sexual health is considered in-depth, which has an important role in the complete well-being of a person as it touches on the many

aspects of public health and the larger culture in the current scenario (Douglas & Fenton, 2013). It is a product of gender norms, roles, expectations, and power dynamics experienced by the individual during psychosocial development, and it needs to be understood within the framework of the social, economic, political, and religious backdrop of individuals (WHO, 2010). As said by WHO (2006) good sexual health entails an optimistic and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, hence understanding human sexuality is imperative in the area of sexual health research.

Sexual function and satisfaction are two major dimensions of sexual health. Normal sexual function is defined as sexual activity with five dimensions: desire and subjective arousal, lubrication, orgasm, satisfaction, pain/discomfort, and how the body reacts with each phase of the sexual response cycle (Rosen et al., 2000). Sexual satisfaction is an emotional response of a person arising from his subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with his sexual relationship (Lawrance & Byers, 1995). Both sexual function and satisfaction are the key indicators of positive sexual health and the importance of sexual function and satisfaction in one's sexual health and the interlink between both have already been established (WHO & UNFPA, 2010; Pakpour et al., 2015; Moreau et al., 2016). Sexual function and satisfaction are varying from person to person over their lifetime. Both are influenced by various factors positively or negatively. This systematic review aims to understand the depth of the literature on factors of sexual health, sexual function, and sexual satisfaction of adults and how these factors influence these variables.

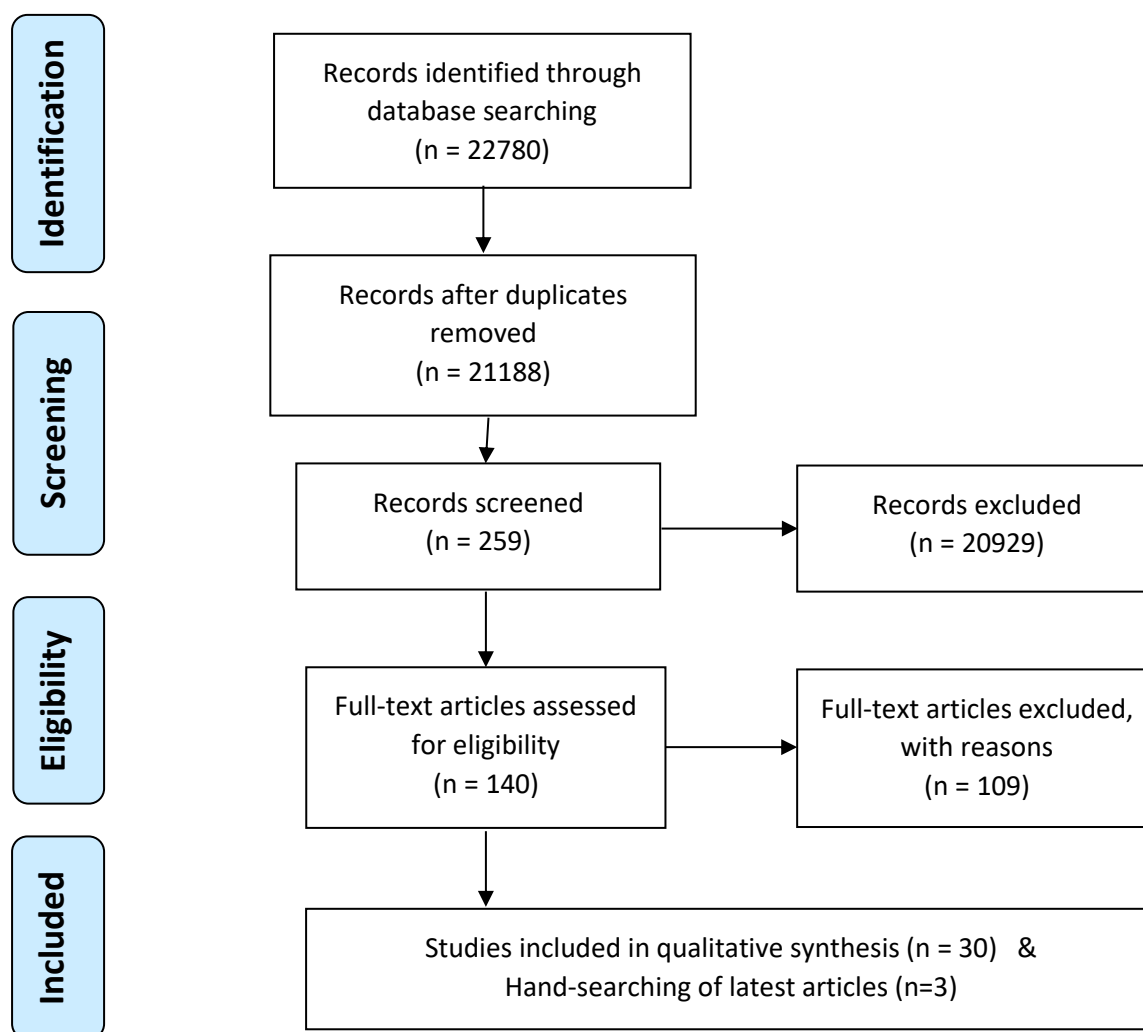
Methods

The qualitative synthesis of this paper is based on the framework of scoping review developed by Arksey and O'Malley in 2005 and the enhanced framework of scoping review by Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien in 2010 (The Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015). As a first step, the specific research question was framed as which are the factors that influence sexual health, sexual function, and sexual satisfaction of married adults. Then framed the review protocol and identified related articles published from 2005 to 2018 from five major

databases - EBSCO, Google Scholar, ProQuest, PubMed, and Scopus. The keywords used for the search of articles in these databases are "sexual health", "reproductive health", "sexuality", "sexually transmitted", "sex" and "sexual".

The screening process of all identified articles did through several levels which include, removing duplicates, removing articles in other languages, removing articles based on title screening, abstract screening, and full-text screening, based on pre-specified inclusion, and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria developed were (a) studies related to various Indicators/Determinants of sexual health of married adults (22 – 45 years) like issues or problems, function, experience, and satisfaction; and (b) studies related to various factors influencing sexual health, sexual function and sexual satisfaction of married adults (22 – 45 years). The major exclusion criteria were, (a) studies done in animals, (b) studies done in any clinical population, (c) articles based on review and conceptual papers, (d) studies related to only reproductive health, and (e) availability of full text. Based on the above-mentioned methodology the researcher identified a total number of 22780 articles from five major databases and selected 30 empirical studies for the scoping review. A manual search of studies related to the specific topics of sexual function and sexual satisfaction was carried out later phase and added 3 more closely related articles for scoping review. Thus the total number of articles selected for the scoping review is 33. The selected articles were portrayed in a ROL Matrix with specific criteria followed by analyzing the same and summarising the results.

Figure 1 Identification and Screening Process of Articles for Scoping Review



Results and discussion

The results of the scoping review are presented under three major headings; literature analysis on factors of sexual health, literature analysis on factors of sexual function, and literature analysis on factors of sexual satisfaction.

Factors of sexual health

Sexual health is a broad area of research, where a lot of studies are carried out with different aspects of the same. Here, the studies on factors affecting the sexual health of adults had taken into the consideration. These factors are either intrapersonal, interpersonal, or environmental. The influence of such factors may be favorable or unfavorable to the individual. The review of literature on this area observed that what are the

factors that influence the sexual health of adults.

Intrapersonal factors

The intrapersonal factors of sexual health are personal or intrinsic factors that are present in an individual. Examples of intrapersonal factors are various biological factors and psychological factors of an individual. The biological factors of the sexual health of an individual can be gender, sexual orientation, body image, physical health, menstrual health, reproductive health, medication, personal characteristics, etc. The review of the literature supports some of the above-mentioned are associated with sexual health. A study conducted among women who use drugs shows the influence of drug use on their sexual health

and sexual behavior (Sharma et al., 2017). Another study also observed a similar finding in males as smoking cessation significantly enhances sexual health (Harte & Meston, 2012). Both these studies pointed out that smoking and drug use are significantly influencing the sexual health of adults. The findings of a study indicate that pre-existing knowledge, ideas, and attitudes about sexuality and aging are important psychological factors in the sexual health of older adults (Gillespie et al., 2017).

Interpersonal factors

Interpersonal factors of sexual health mean any factor that involves or occurs between two people, especially between partners of sexual life. In that way, communication and sexual compatibility are two important interpersonal factors in the sexual health and behavior of older adults (Gillespie et al., 2017). Both have a positive influence on their sexual health and behavior.

Environmental factors

These are the factors that exist in the surroundings of an individual or factors that arise situationally. The reviews supported that some environmental factors influence the sexual health of adults. According to Espinoza et al. (2014), sociocultural beliefs and gendered power dynamics are influencing the sexual health and behaviors of migrant and non-migrant women at a large level. Other environment-related factors for the sexual health of migrant women in China are the work environment and nature of work (Huang et al., 2016). Also, studies show that there is a geographical difference in sexual health issues among adults. In India, the prevalence of sexual and reproductive health issues exists among rural women, and irrespective of marital status they were ill-equipped to deal with them (Banerjee et al., 2015).

Factors of sexual function

This section describes the results of the review of literature on factors of the sexual function of

adults. The identified factors that are influencing the sexual function of adults are grouped into either intrapersonal, interpersonal, or environmental factors. Also, the reviews revealed that the identified factors have either positive or negative impacts on the sexual function of the individual.

Intrapersonal factors

Intrapersonal factors of the sexual function of adults may vary from person to person and even throughout the life cycle of an individual. The possible intrapersonal factors of sexual function can be biological or psychological. Intrapersonal factors related biological aspect of the sexual function of an individual are the concept of body image, physical health, health issues, medication, personal characteristics, lifestyle, etc. A study in India revealed that gynecological disorders such as Pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), endometriosis, retroverted uteri, fundal fibroid, and pelvic organ prolapse are significant factors that negatively influence the sexual function of fertile women in India. The same study also states that other medical conditions like thyroid disorders, urinary incontinence, diabetes, and hypertension are significantly associated with female sexual function and become a cause of FSD in women (Mishra et al., 2016). Amidu et al. (2010) observed that alcohol consumption is a significant negative factor in sexual function. The same was supported by another article as excessive use of alcohol and recreational drugs negatively affects the normal sexual function of adults (Avasthi et al., 2017). Other factors of the sexual function of adults are tubectomy (Kunker et al., 2017), pregnancy and childbirth, inadequate sexual information, and traumatic previous sexual experience (Avasthi et al., 2017). Aging and menopause are identified as negative factors in the sexual function of older women (Mernone et al., 2019). However, two studies revealed that obesity is not correlating with sexual function among women (Carrilho et al., 2015; Kadioglu et al., 2010). The literature says the most important unfavorable psychological factor in

the sexual function of adults is stress (Pakpour et al., 2015; Mishra et al., 2016). Stress has a negative association with the sexual function of adults and the type and level of stress again influence the sexual life. Another article indicates that the sexual function of adults is negatively influenced by some psychological factors like depression, anxiety, guilt, fear of intimacy, unreasonable expectation, and impaired self-image (Avasthi et al., 2017). Attachment anxiety was found as an unfavorable factor in the sexual function of young adults by van den Brink et al., (2016).

Interpersonal factors

The factors of sexual function of adults that occur between the partners are labeled under this category of interpersonal factors. Various studies observed the association of some interpersonal factors with the sexual function of adults. The literature review observed that poor emotional intimacy and poor communication are negatively influencing the sexual function of adults (Avasthi et al., 2017). The studies observed that romantic attachment is positively linked to body appreciation and in turn, it acts as a significant favorable factor in the sexual function of young adults (van den Brink et al., 2016), and partner performance is significantly associated with the sexual function of adults (Pakpour et al., 2015). Partner-prescribed sexual perfectionism was identified as a crucial negative factor in the sexual function of females as it contributes to women's negative self-concept and leads to FSD (Stoeber & Harvey, 2016). Mernone et al. (2019) revealed that interpersonal aspects such as the partner's personality traits such as optimism, emotional support from the partner, and relationship satisfaction were important predictors of healthy sexual functioning in older women.

Environmental factors

Few studies have given evidence for some environmental factors of the sexual function of adults. Factors of sexual function in this category include social, cultural, familial, and or situational factors. Restricted upbringing and

disturbed family relationships were identified as negative factors in the sexual function of adults (Avasthi et al., 2017). It means poor upbringing of the individual in childhood and any kind of family problems lead to poor sexual functioning. According to Mishra et al. (2016), sexual dysfunction was also more common in females who have lower education and lower socioeconomic status. It means the level of education and socio-economic status are acting as influencing factors of sexual function among females. However, more studies are required on these variables to understand how these variables influence the sexual function of adults across the world as the socio-cultural background is varying from place to place.

Another set of studies discussed the geographical difference in sexual function and related aspects of adults across various countries. Japanese middle adults are more worried about sexual functioning than older adults (Takayanagi et al., 2016), the prevalence rate of sexual dysfunction is high among both Saudi and non-Saudi female healthcare providers (Rouzi et al., 2015), and in France, sexual dysfunction is very common among young adults (Moreau et al., 2016), and in Ghana, around 65% of husbands and 70% wives were having sexual function disorders (Amidu et al., 2011). While, in India, the prevalence rate of sexual dysfunction among fertile women in Ahmedabad was 55.55% (Mishra, et al., 2016), sexual dysfunction among women aged 18-65 in the rural areas of Tamil Nadu was 64.3% (Viswanathan et al., 2014), and sexual dysfunction rate is high among women in Mysore (Kunker et al., 2017). Also, another study revealed that sexual behavior among young married women in India is not different from Western studies and the prevalence of FSD was only 17.7% (Avasthi et al., 2008).

Factors of sexual satisfaction

This section describes the results of the review of the literature on factors of sexual satisfaction among adults. The section has three subsections

intrapersonal factors, interpersonal factors, and environmental factors of sexual satisfaction of adults where the identified factors are explained based on their characteristics. Also, the reviews revealed that the identified factors have either positive or negative impacts on the sexual satisfaction of the individual.

Intrapersonal factors

Both biological and psychological factors present within the individual that have any kind of influence on the sexual satisfaction of adults are discussed in this section. According to Velten and Margraf (2017), the age of an adult is not a significant factor in his or her sexual satisfaction. Studies revealed that psycho-physiological therapy including stretching and breathing exercises leads to improved sexual satisfaction among males (Bay et al., 2013), while therapeutic interventions and mental factors negatively affect sexual satisfaction among persons with infertility (Shoji et al., 2014).

Another study observed that sexual motives are significantly predicting sexual satisfaction for both genders and sexual motives were a more consistent predictor of sexual satisfaction for women than men (Stephenson et al., 2011). According to Dundon and Rellini (2010), psychological well-being is a positive predictor and menopausal symptoms are a negative predictor of sexual satisfaction among midlife women. Another study observed that poor sexual self-esteem, absence of social responsibility, poor sexual function, and no previous information about sexuality are significant negative factors of sexual satisfaction among married women in Northern Ethiopia (Zegeye et al., 2020).

A study based on the review of literature on affecting factors on sexual satisfaction in women observed that a decrease in sexual satisfaction among women occurs with the increase in age; with a high age gap between couples; with various medical conditions like diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, menopause, urinary incontinence, genital tract surgeries,

obesity, and infertility; with psychological factors like depression and anxiety; and with substance abuse (Shahhosseini et al., 2014).

Interpersonal factors

The factors existing between the partners have been included in this section and discuss how those interpersonal factors affect sexual function. Poor partner communication was significantly associated with low sexual satisfaction (Zegeye et al., 2020) and this finding was supported in another study as good interpersonal communication skills, social skills, and conflict resolution skills of couples were significantly associated with high sexual satisfaction among adults (Shahhosseini et al., 2014). It also found that mutual pleasure is a significant favorable factor in sexual satisfaction (Pascoal et al., 2014). A study on couples in early marriage life revealed that own marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction were bi-directionally positively associated with one another and own sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex were bi-directionally positively associated with one another (McNulty et al., 2016). Also, it is found that sexual function and sexual satisfaction are related among adult people (Moreau et al., 2016; Pakpour et al., 2015). However, factors like relationship duration (Velten & Margraf, 2017), and male circumcision (Zulu et al., 2015; Kigozi et al., 2009) were not identified as deteriorating factors of sexual satisfaction in adults. Another study among males with recurrent pregnancy loss partners in China found that their sexual satisfaction is impaired (Zhang et al., 2016). Another study observed that relationship adjustment is a significant factor in sexual satisfaction among adults (Dundon & Rellini, 2010).

Environmental factors

The environmental factors of sexual satisfaction include various socio-cultural and family-related factors. The most important environmental factors of sexual satisfaction are cultural beliefs and attitudes, socio-cultural taboos, lower economic level, number of

children, family responsibilities (Shahhosseini et al., 2014), and the perception of sexual talk as taboo (Zegeye et al., 2020). All these have a negative association with the sexual satisfaction of adults. Another study reported a contradictory finding as higher education status of women can either be a favorable or an unfavorable factor for sexual satisfaction of women and this difference may occur because of the presence of other extraneous factors. Another major finding by Shahhosseini et al. (2014) was that working women have higher sexual satisfaction and non-working women have less sexual satisfaction.

The review findings can be concluded as various psychological, physical, social, familial, and cultural factors influence the sexual health, function, and satisfaction of married adults. The influence of such factors is either favorable or unfavorable to the overall sexual health of married adults. It is also noticed that, though adequate research is available in the area of sexual health, sexual function, and sexual satisfaction of married adults in the western context, the number of published evidence is very limited in India. And the available studies in the area of sexual function and sexual satisfaction in the Indian context are majorly focused on the clinical population. The literature review explored a dearth of studies with a specific focus on various factors that influence the sexual function and satisfaction of adults in the Indian context.

Conclusion

This review summarized as sexual health, sexual function, and sexual satisfaction of adults varies from individual to individual and depends on various factors across the world. These factors can be either intrapersonal, interpersonal, or environmental. Also, from the review, it can be concluded as sexual health, sexual functions, and sexual satisfaction are related and influenced by social, cultural, economic, familial, physical, and psychological determinants, positively or negatively. The

review infers the need of exploring various factors of sexual health, sexual function, and sexual satisfaction in various cultural contexts. Also indicate the need for in-depth gender-specific studies in this area with a deep focus on each kind of factor, as the factors are varying among male and females.

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