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Sexual satisfaction's contribution to a sense of quality of life in early adulthood

Abstract

The main target of this article was to demonstrate that sexual satisfaction enhances the quality of life of young women and men. Nowadays there is no controversy about sexuality being important, so it seems reasonable to include sexual contentment as an area of human activity.

Fifty-one men and 49 women aged of 23–35, working and remaining childless, and in informal relationships for over a year participated in the research. The Questionnaire of Quality of Life by Straś–M. Romanowska (2005; Frąckowiak, 2004) and the Questionnaire of Sexual Life Satisfaction (author's method) were used in the measurement.

Results have revealed – as expected – important links between sexual satisfaction and one's sense of quality of life as well as interesting differences between women and men in this area (psychophysical, psychosocial, subjective, metaphysical) : in the group of women, strength of connection between variables occurred to be stronger than in the group of men; also, women's sexual satisfaction passed through all the important quality of life spheres, while in the men's group, not only does it connect with the global quality of life rating, but it also has a strong connection with the psychophysical sphere. Results of the research lead, for example, to a direct connection between sexual satisfaction with a sense of quality of life, especially among women.

Keywords: sense of quality of life, sexual satisfaction.

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Introduction

Sexuality is undeniably an element of human nature and, for most people, plays an important and different role in various stages of life. Sexual activity is beneficial, which includes not only fulfilled reproductive goals. It also sustains relationship contentment and delivers emotional, psychological and physical pleasure (Bancroft, 2009). Even temporary a fortiori time-sustaining disorders may be a cause for frustration, stress, anxiety and depression. It may also negatively influence a relationship and other life areas (Arrington and others, 2004). Gulczyńska and Jankowiak's (2006) research results show that persons remaining in stable sexual relationships or who are able to initiate sexual interaction and have regular intercourse have a higher sense of coherence, resourcefulness and meaningfulness. The importance of sexual satisfaction in the whole life cycle and its non-reproductive benefits is shown in its positive influence for general contentment and healthy sense of the elderly. Sexual satisfaction strongly correlates with quality of life and happiness (Rosen, Bachmann, 2008). Research conducted by the Copenhagen Quality-of-Life Research Center on a population of 2400 people aged of 18–88 showed that people with sexual disorders have up to a 20 % lower quality of life level than healthy people (Ventegodt, 1998).

A satisfying sexual life is a subjective concept difficult to operationalize. Sexual satisfaction has been defined as an emotional answer to the subjective evaluation of both positive and negative dimensions of sexual life (Young and others, 2000), or as a highly personalized feeling strongly related with past sexual experience, and current expectations and aspirations (Davidson, 1995, after: Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, 1997). Similarly to one's health when treated holistically – that is, not only as a lack of disease, disorder or disability (WHO, 2010) – evaluation of a satisfactory sexual life includes more elements than just a lack of dissatisfaction. According to Janda (1998) these elements include many other sexual and non-sexual aspects of life. The Center for Marital and Sexual Health (Rossen, 2005) presents a model of sexual life entangled in context, which includes quality of relationship, health, having children, job satisfaction, mental health and life stage. These elements condition the sexual relation and its level of satisfaction significantly. Haavio-Mannila and Kontula (1997) distinguish five keys for a satisfactory sexual life: social background (age, atmosphere surrounding sexuality and religiosity at home, educational resources, time of first sexual experiences), sexual ideas (significance of sexual life in the background of other areas of life, assertiveness in sexual matters, perception of one's own sexual abilities, activeness and attractiveness), emotional ties between partners (being loved and reciprocating that love), sexual techniques and practiques (using sexual gadgets and materials,

purity of intercourse, multiplicity of techniques and positions), and orgasm (frequency of ending intercourse with a feeling of intense pleasure).

Much research indicates the relation between self-esteem and the quality of sexual life. A sense of physical attractiveness and high self-esteem abound with greater sexual life satisfaction and lack of inhibitions in this area (Bancroft, 2009; Baumeister and others, 2003). A positive picture of one's own body and sense of physical attractiveness positively correlate with women's sexual satisfaction (Pujols and others, 2010).

Temperament conditions may also be significant for a positive evaluation of sexual life. It is possible that people seeking experiences will have intercourse more often and, because of boredom, will diversify it with different techniques and positions, which increases the level of sexual satisfaction (Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, 1997). Different stimuli may stimulate them more quickly, with released sexual tension being sustained for a shorter period of time (although it has not been proved that highly reactive people – not searching, but even avoiding strong experiences – lead less satisfactory sexual life). The fact that intercourse may take place more rarely with less tendency to introduce new stimuli does not have to minimize its quality rating. Possibly the most important point is to match the partner's needs while adapting sexual activity to one's own individual needs.

Sexual satisfaction both sexes (especially for women) is strongly correlated with relationship satisfaction (Rosen, Bachmann, 2008). Acceptance of the partner, feeling bonded to him and having an accepting attitude to his problems have a direct influence on the woman's sexual reactivity (Depko, 2010). Laumann's research (1994, after: Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, 1997) indicates that the greater source of sexual pleasure lies in monogamous relations rather than in polygamous relations. The researcher explains this with the possibility that mutual needs can be explored over a longer period of time. Such a relationship also creates the possibility of building greater intimacy between partners, a factor especially important for women's sexual satisfaction (Basson, 2005; Young and others, 2000). Proximity and feeling secure enable needs to be communicated openly. Couples who are able to talk about sex lead a more satisfactory sexual life, because they not only can initiate intercourse and talk about their needs, but can also refuse sexual activity or activities which they do not want or do not accept (Haavio-Mannila, Kontula, 1997).

Selection of personal characteristics seems to be more crucial for women. Research indicates that in cases of extroverted compatibility with their partner, women who were introverted and neurotic declared that they had a more satisfactory sexual life. In these same couples, this relation does not accord to men (Farley, Davis, 1980). Research conducted by the Kinsey Institute (Bancroft, 2009) indi-

cates that awareness of the the male partner's sexual satisfaction and the woman's being desired by him is crucial for women's sexual life satisfaction.

For sexual relationships of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) people, support is in an acceptance of the surroundings, which enables persons to lead their lives openly in the manner of their own identity (Bojarska, Kowalczyk, 2010). Problems these people experience in their own relationships are analogical to those in heterosexual relationships (Bancroft, 2009).

Our own research

The author's research attempted to answer the following two questions:

- What is the relation between sexual satisfaction and sense of quality of life, and are there gender differences in the analysis?
- It was anticipated that a high sexual satisfaction level relates to a high sense of quality of life for both men and women.

Quality of life is understood in accordance with Straś-Romanowska's (2005) concept as a cognitive and emotional evaluation associated with a particular way of life, which consists of relationships, types of experiences, activities and development.

The concept is divided into four dimensions – biological, social, subjective and spiritual – which correspond to the spheres of quality of life:

- *Psychophysical sphere* – is associated with the biological dimension. It is physicality and human desire. Its function is to enable the survival of both the individual and species through preservation of life and health. Disturbance of this area may be caused by illness. Contained within this sphere are genetic predispositions, inherent and independent of human factors such as appearance, temperament and vitality.
- *Psychosocial Sphere* – is associated with the social dimension. This is a feeling of acceptance and self-worth, belonging, security and social identity. Dysfunction in this sphere can be a feeling of loneliness.
- *Personal Sphere* – corresponds to the personal dimension and is expressed with a sense of individuality, bears the responsibility for one's own life, realizing personal goals and sense of being authentic, is "in harmony with oneself."
- *Metaphysical Sphere* – refers to the spiritual dimension. Constitutes the acceptance and implementation of values that are timeless and universal. Is combined with a sense of meaning, religious experiences, and human spirituality. It promotes moral responsibility in accordance with one's conscience.

Sexual satisfaction is associated with one's attitude (cognitive and emotional) to their own sexual attractiveness and undertaken sexual activity. It was assumed

that the intensity of sexual satisfaction is expressed by the level of self-esteem of their own sexual attractiveness and undertaken sexual activity.

Method

One hundred people took part (49 women and 51 men) in the research. Selection criteria were age (between 23 and 35), remaining in a stationary, childless relationship for at least a year, and being employed.

In order to measure the variables, the following methods were used: Questionnaire of Quality of Life (Frąckowiak, 2004) and the author's Questionnaire of Sexual Satisfaction. It contains 10 statements related to the two areas (in accordance with the accepted definition of sexual pleasure): one's own sexual attraction and undertaken sexual activity. The examined person used Likert's four-grade scale to answer. In order to maintain theoretical accuracy, competent judges were used, analyses of discriminatory powers (Table 1) were conducted, and use of confirmatory factor analysis completed the accuracy. Questions with discriminatory powers lower than 0.4 were removed from the questionnaire and omitted in further analysis. Also questions which had a duplex Pearson correlation were removed, assuming that they can be too similar to each other and carry the same content. Confirmatory factor analysis showed the existence of one factor. The RMSE (root-mean-square error) ratio, which was 0.073, was used for match ratings (Table 2). Reliability of the method measured by the Cronbach alpha (0.83) indicates a high consistency of the test.

Table 1. Questions of discriminatory power

question number	p1	p2	p3	p4	p5	p6	p7	p8	p9	p10
Pearson correlation	0.675	0.449	0.589	0.583	0.692	0.654	0.715	0.603	0.649	0.637
significance (duplex)	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001	0.001

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis

RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
0.073	0.001	0.133	0.289

Results

The average level of sense of quality of life in both groups examined was 185.38 (results varied from 143 to 217). Average results in individual spheres were psychosocial 47.67, psychophysical 47.37, subjective 46.66, and metaphysical 46.75.

In the group of women the average quality of life level was 186.65 (results varied from 143 to 217) and in the group of men 184.16 (151 to 209). The women's results in individual spheres were subjective 47 (from 32 to 55), psychosocial 48.24 (36–56), psychophysical 47.63 (34–58), and metaphysical 46.9 (34–57). For men: subjective sphere 46.3 (from 34 to 58), psychosocial sphere 47.12 (35–56), psychophysical sphere also 47.12 (31–59), and metaphysical sphere 46.61 (36–58). Analysis using the Student t-test showed that differences between sexes on average values of a global sense of quality of life and its spheres is not statistically significant (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison of average results of sense of quality of life in groups of men and women

Sense of quality of life	Woman (N=49)	Men (N=51)
Global result	186.65	184.16
Psychophysical sphere	47.6327	47.1176
Psychosocial sphere	48.2449	47.1176
Subjective sphere	47.0000	46.3333
Metaphysical sphere	46.8980	46.6078

The overall average of sexual satisfaction was 33.71 (from 15 to 40). Among the women the average was 34, and among the men 33.35. Student t-test results showed that the difference between sexes on average values of sexual life satisfaction was not statistically significant.

In order to determine a relation between sense of quality of life and its spheres and sexual satisfaction an analysis of correlation was made. The R-Pearson coefficient of variables correlation ($r = 0.453$; $p < 0.001$) indicates statistical significance, but with moderate dependence (Table 4).

Table 4. Pearson correlation between sexual satisfaction and sense of quality of life and its dimensions

Psychophysical sphere	0.533(**)
Psychosocial sphere	0.243(*)
Subjective sphere	0.310(**)
Metaphysical sphere	0.262(**)
Global sense of quality of life result	0.453(**)

* Correlation is significant on level 0.05 (duplex)

** Correlation is significant on level 0.001 (duplex)

Analysis of dependency of the sexual satisfaction on individual quality of life indicated the existence of statistically significant relations between variables, but

the weakest ones occurred to be relations of sexual satisfaction with the psychosocial and metaphysical spheres.

In order to answer the question if sexual satisfaction is a predictor of a sense of quality of life, regression analysis was used (Table 5). It confirmed the supposition that the higher the level of sexual satisfaction, the higher the level of sense of quality of life. It also indicated that sexual satisfaction is a strong predictor of sense of quality of life only in the psychophysical sphere.

Table 5. Regression analysis for dependent variable of sense of quality of life and independent variables of sexual sense of quality of life

Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	significance
	B	Standard error	Beta		
Constant	113.838	8.975		12.684	0.001
Sexual satisfaction	0.713	0.267	0.223	2.670	0.009

Interesting results were given by the intersexual comparison of correlation strengths of sexual satisfaction with a sense of quality of life and its individual spheres. In women sexual satisfaction related significantly not only to the global result, but also to all quality of life spheres. Analysis of correlation results in the group of men indicated a strong relation of sexual satisfaction only with the global result and psychophysical sphere. Correlation of women's sexual satisfaction with a sense of quality of life and its spheres was stronger (Table 6).

Table 6. Pearson's correlation between sexual satisfaction and sense of quality of life and its spheres for men and women

Women	Psychophysical sphere	0.588(**)
	Psychosocial sphere	0.456(**)
	Subjective sphere	0.365(**)
	Metaphysical sphere	0.378(**)
	Global result of sense of quality of life	0.567(**)
Men	Psychophysical sphere	0.477(**)
	Psychosocial sphere	0.005
	Subjective sphere	0.239
	Metaphysical sphere	0.113
	Global result of sense of quality of life	0.304(*)

* Correlation is significant on level 0.05 (duplex)

** Correlation is significant on level 0.001 (duplex)

Discussion

Our research showed significant relations between a sense of quality of life and sexual satisfaction: the higher the sexual satisfaction, the higher the quality of life. Contrary to stereotypes, sexual satisfaction is more strongly related to the women's sense of quality of life in both its global rating and its individual spheres. In the group of men sexual satisfaction relates only to global quality and to the psychophysical dimension of sense of quality of life. Research results confirm the opinion of sexologists: women's sense of quality of life relates not only to the physical aspect of sexuality but – extremely important to them – to the wider context – situational, social, and psychic. It is this wider context which decides about recognizing and interpreting the stimulation as sexual (Depko, 2010). A circular model of women's sexuality, proposed by Basson (2005) supposes that physical pleasure from intercourse and release sexual need are only two out of many reasons for engaging in sexual activity. Especially important and sometimes even more important than the physical pleasure for women are a sense of intimacy, emotional satisfaction, a sense of their attractiveness and relationship contentment – all of which can be built and strengthened through sex. It so happens that women may engage in sexual activity in order to fulfill these needs, but do not experience desire and arousal. However, arousal can be induced as a result of erotic stimulation. Changes in cognitive stimuli, understood early on as neutral, can eventually become highly stimulating. With this consideration in mind, research conducted on the group of women may be interpreted twofold. Firstly, for women context can have a much stronger influence in creating sexual pleasure than it appears to men. Secondly, a high level of sexual satisfaction can uplift contentment in other life spheres, such as interpersonal relations and self-attitude (sense of attractiveness, self-esteem, and health issues).

Sexual life satisfaction and sexual health are more often being understood in the context of discussions about quality of life and conditions of human health. Our research indicates that sexual satisfaction is an important indicator of global quality of life among young adults. However, further understanding that sexual satisfaction has implications for quality of life and health definitely needs further inquiry and empiric findings.

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