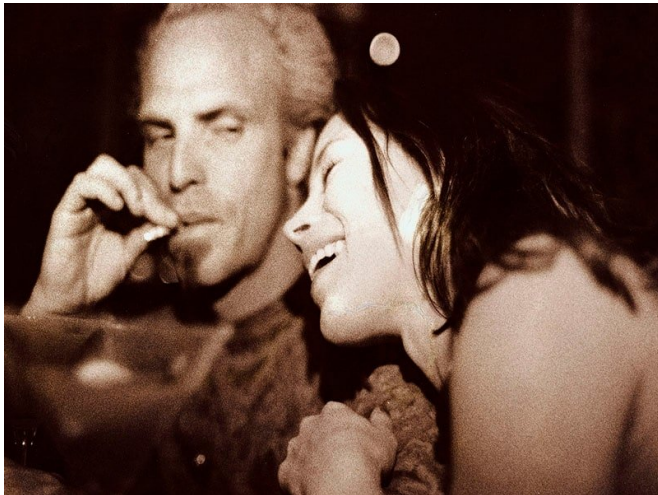


Nearly one in ten Americans struggles to control sexual urges

9 November 2018, by Serena Gordon, Healthday Reporter



Dickenson explained that such behaviors can vary widely. "Some people might masturbate excessively so that it interferes with the ability to work, or someone might be paying for sex so much that it's damaging financially," she explained, adding that sexual behaviors become a problem when they influence your life in a way that's destructive.

So, does that mean people like Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein should be excused for aberrant and potentially criminal behavior?

"When anyone faces a problem and there's a classification for that problem, it doesn't mean that it excuses that behavior. [In these cases], there's this link between hypersexuality and non-consent, but these are two separate issues that can be hard to tease apart," Dickenson explained.

(HealthDay)—The #MeToo movement has given many Americans a glimpse into an unfamiliar world that may have left many wondering, "What were they thinking?"

It turns out they might not have been thinking much at all. New research suggests that almost 9 percent of people in the United States have distress caused by difficulty controlling their sexual feelings, urges and behaviors.

But the gap between genders was very small: Just over 10 percent of men showed compulsive sexual behavior, compared to 7 percent of women.

"Historically, it's been thought that compulsive sexual behaviors affect mostly men. But women are showing that they are experiencing difficulty controlling sexual urges and behavior, too," said study author Janna Dickenson. She is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis.

Michael Klein, a psychologist at Gracie Square Hospital in New York City, said it's difficult to comment on individual cases, but "it's possible that these high-profile cases reflect examples of compulsive sexual behavior. However, it may also be better explained by something else, such as taking advantage of a power dynamic, in the context of another [psychological] condition, or any combination of factors."

Mental health professionals have long debated whether or not sexual addiction is an actual addiction or an impulse disorder. What is common to problematic sexual behavior, no matter how it is classified, is substantial difficulty controlling sexual feelings, urges and behaviors to the point that it causes distress and impairment.

Distress and impairment includes neglecting social activities or personal health, repeatedly attempting to control sexual behavior unsuccessfully, and engaging in sexual behavior despite adverse consequences or minimal pleasure from his or her sexual activities, according to the researchers.

Using this definition, the study team asked more than 2,000 people to complete a screening test for compulsive sexual disorder. The study participants were already a part of a nationally representative study on sexual health and behavior. They were all between the ages of 18 and 50.

The researchers expected between 1 percent and 6 percent of the study group would meet the definition of compulsive sexual behavior disorder (CSBD). Instead, 8.6 percent of those screened were found to possibly have CSBD.

Dickenson said it's important to note that this study only used a screening tool. Someone who tests positive on this test should be referred for further evaluation.

Klein added that "a large study such as this helps to increase our understanding of [compulsive sexual behavior](#) and related phenomena, as well as provide for future directions of study," but there are a lot of issues left to sort out.

"There is a difference between feelings and actions, and thoughts and actions; having trouble controlling urges is not the same as acting on urges," he said. And cultural, social and religious norms and beliefs can impact how someone feels about sexual behavior.

Both experts said that if someone is concerned about their sexual behaviors, they should seek help.

"People need to realize there is a wide spectrum of sexuality. Thoughts and feelings are one thing, but [behavior](#) that you are unable to control is another matter. If certain behaviors interfere with your life or cause distress for you or others, you may want to speak with a professional," Klein said.

The study was published online Nov. 9 in the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

More information: *JAMA Network Open* (2018). jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen.2018.4468

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