

# Most young women unhappy, stressed about their sex lives, study finds

23 February 2020



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Half of young Australian women experience sexually-related personal distress, with one in five women having at least one female sexual dysfunction (FSD), new research by Monash University shows.

A study conducted by the Women's Health Research Program at Monash University has reported, for the first time, an overall picture of the sexual wellbeing of Australian [women](#) between the ages of 18 and 39. The findings have been published today (Monday 24 February 2020) in the international journal, *Fertility and Sterility*.

Results showed 50.2 per cent of young Australian women experienced some form of sexually-related personal distress. This relates to the degree of feeling guilty, embarrassed, stressed or unhappy about their sex lives.

A concerning 29.6 per cent of women experienced sexually-related personal distress without dysfunction, and 20.6 per cent had at least one FSD.

The most common FSD was low sexual self-image, which caused distress for 11 per cent of study participants. Arousal, desire, orgasm and responsiveness dysfunction affected 9 per cent, 8 per cent, 7.9 per cent and 3.4 per cent of the study cohort respectively.

Sexual self-image dysfunction was associated with being overweight, obese, living together with partner, not married, married and breastfeeding.

Taking psychotropic medication (such as antidepressants), reported by 20 per cent of surveyed women, had the most pervasive impact on sexual function. The use of the combined [oral contraceptive pill](#) was not associated with any [sexual dysfunction](#).

"Sexual wellbeing is recognised as a fundamental human right. It is of great concern that one in five [young women](#) have an apparent sexual dysfunction and half of all women within this age group experience sexually-related personal distress," senior author and Professor of Women's Health at Monash University, Susan Davis, said.

"This is a wake-up call to the community and signals the importance of [health](#) professionals being open and adequately prepared to discuss young women's sexual health concerns."

The Grollo-Ruzzene Foundation Younger Women's Health Study, funded by Grollo Ruzzene Foundation, recruited 6986 women aged 18-39 years, living in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, to take part in the study.

All women completed a questionnaire that assessed their sexual wellbeing in terms of desire, arousal, responsiveness, orgasm, and self-image. Participants also evaluated whether they had sexually-associated personal distress and provided extensive demographic information.

Almost one-third of participants described themselves as single, 47 per cent had a body mass index within the normal range, and nearly 70 per cent had reported being sexually active in the 30 days preceding the study.

Women who habitually monitored their appearance, and for whom appearance determined their level of physical self-worth, reported being less sexually assertive and more self-conscious during intimacy, and experienced lower sexual satisfaction.

Professor Davis said if untreated, sexually-related personal distress and FSD could impact relationships and overall quality of life as women aged.

"The high prevalence of sexually-related personal [distress](#) signals the importance of health professionals, particularly those working in the fields of gynaecology and fertility, being adequately prepared to routinely ask young women about any sexual health concerns, and to have an appropriate management or referral pathway in place," Professor Davis said.

**More information:** The prevalence of sexual dysfunctions and sexually-related distress in young women: a cross-sectional survey, *Fertility and Sterility* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.fertnstert.2019.09.027](#)

Provided by Monash University

APA citation: Most young women unhappy, stressed about their sex lives, study finds (2020, February 23) retrieved 22 June 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-02-young-women-unhappy-stressed-sex.html>

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