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Too old for contraception? The awareness of STIs risk and transmission among older adults in Poland

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Statement of the Problem: As scientific findings show, improved longevity, together with pharmacological enhancement and evolving social conventions result in people remaining sexually active in older age. However, it remains a taboo in many countries, which leads to i.e., excluding aging cohort from sexual health promotion. An increased prevalence of sexually transmitted illnesses among the older population follows. The aim of this study was to assess the awareness of STIs, safe sex behaviors and transmission factors in that group.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: An original pen-and-paper questionnaire was used to obtain the qualitative and quantitative data regarding participants' sex life, knowledge about various STIs, groups of risk, using STI preventative measures. The explanation for each was obtained by additional open questions.

Findings: Participants' cognizance of existing STIs was limited, only HIV/AIDS was frequently mentioned. Small percentage showed any knowledge about the actions to be taken when suspecting an infection. Only 17% declared ever consulting a healthcare specialist regarding possible sexual problem. In respondents' opinion, STIs are a problem of young people only. Only one third of participants reported having protected sex, the main reason for omitting was a female partner being too old to get pregnant. The youngest respondents' (age group 50-59) awareness was overall the highest.

Conclusion & Significance: Older adults in Poland display very limited knowledge and understanding of STIs, and the awareness diminishes with age. Their risky sexual activities and very low rate of help-seeking behaviors lead to significant morbidity and distress. Further research is required, as well as age-appropriate interventions to impart knowledge and skills needed to reduce the risk of STIs in aging cohort.

Biography

Gabriela Gore-Gorszewska has her interest in human nature from both philosophical and psychological perspective (Master's degree from Jagiellonian University, Poland, in 2010 and 2016, respectively). In recent years, her interests focus upon human sexuality as seen by the psychologist. She has done her education from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland, to achieve Diploma in Clinical Sexology. Her main area of expertise and research is sexual functioning of older adults. Her aim is to promote accurate and up-to-date knowledge about age-related changes in sexual life. She believes there is still not enough understanding and too much prejudice among healthcare professionals, experts and authorities, seniors themselves and general population, especially within the communities with strong sexual taboo and/or religious attitudes present.

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