

## **Disabilities and Sexual Satisfaction in Older Adulthood:**

### **A Comparison of Cohabitors and Marrieds**

#### **Abstract**

The impact of functional limitations on sexual satisfaction within romantic relationship is understudied. The proposed research examines the relationship between functional limitations and sexual satisfaction and whether variations occur by union status. Data from the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP) will be used. This dataset includes a significant subset of questions examining sexual satisfaction and functional limitations from husband/wife dyads as well as intimate partners. A total of 957 couples, where each partners were interviewed will be included in the model using  $\pm 7$  questions on functional limitation and  $\pm 39$  related to sexual satisfaction. Functional limitations will be measured as a summated score. Sexual satisfaction will be measured as a latent variable. Findings will add to the literature by illustrating that sexual behavior among older adult couples reflect a lifelong pattern of sexuality started during adolescence and early adulthood and the importance of disabilities in understanding this association.

## **Disabilities and Sexual Satisfaction in Older Adulthood: A Comparison of Cohabitors and Marrieds**

### **Extended Abstract**

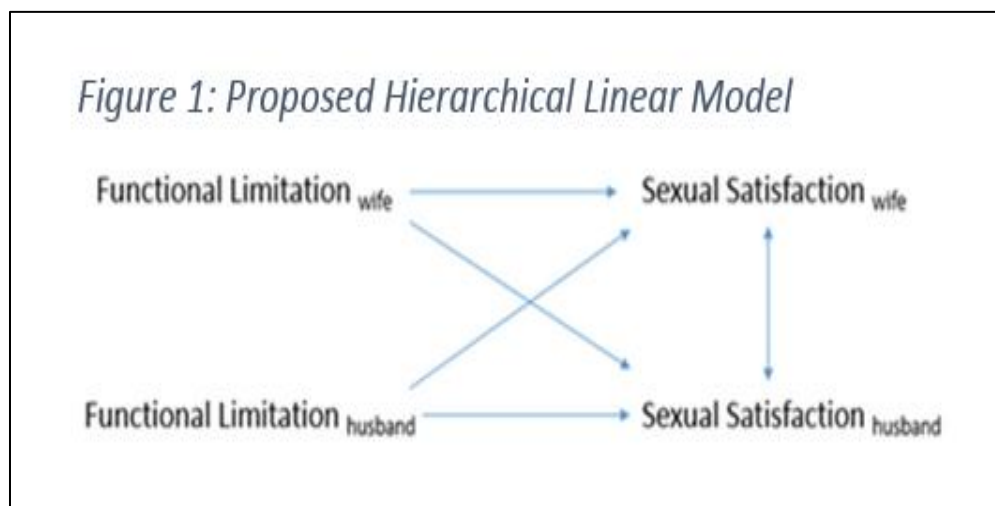
Although sexuality is viewed as an important component of most romantic relationships (Sprecher et al. 2006), research on sexuality and aging provides mixed results. Studies find that with aging, sexual expression decreases and this is also related to physical illness, adverse effects of medication and or lack of available partner (Ginsberg et al. 2005). Other research provides evidence that elderly individuals exhibit sexual interest and activity (Benbow and Beeston 2012). Yet, there is limited research on sexuality among the elderly (Beckman et al. 2008; Snyder and Zweig 2010).

During older adulthood there still remains the need for acceptance, tenderness and warmth (Berberich 2004) and as such the elderly continue to enjoy their sexual life as best as is possible (Benbow and Beeston 2012). While factors such as physical ability and partner availability are associated with sexual activity in older age (Lindau et al 2007), research on persons living with disabilities, often examines physical manifestations with less emphasis on attitudes and perceptions of their personal life, including sexual satisfaction. Partners with disabled spouses report significantly different levels of emotional status and ability about their partner with a disability, than their partner reports about themselves (Cano, Johansen, and Franz 2005). Assessing sexual satisfaction among older adult couples with disabilities is important as sexual activity is associated with relationship satisfaction (Sprecher 2002). Union status is relevant to the discussion of sexual satisfaction and disability as changes in union formation patterns suggest cohabitators are becoming more marriage-like. Further, research indicates that cohabitation among adults 50 years and older is rising rapidly (Brown et al. 2012). However, to

date no study has focused exclusively on older cohabitators with disability and sexual satisfaction. Therefore, the question of whether cohabiting and married older couples experience similar or different levels of sexual satisfaction control for disability is yet to be answered.

Wave 2 data collected from the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (NSHAP) in 2010 and 2011 will be used. This national area probability sample of community residing adults born between 1920 and 1947 includes a significant subset of questions examining sexual satisfaction and functional limitations from husband/wife dyads as well as intimate partners. Approximately 957 couples, where each partner were interviewed will be included in the model using  $\pm 7$  questions on functional limitation and  $\pm 39$  related to sexual satisfaction. Functional limitations will be measured as a summated score. Sexual satisfaction will be measured as a latent variable. We will employ the use of Hierarchical Linear Models (HLM) to answer the following questions (see Figure 1 below):

1. Is functional limitation (FL) of wife/female partner associated with sexual satisfaction of wife/female partner?
2. Is the wife's/female partner's FL associated with sexual satisfaction of husband/male partner?
3. Is the husband's/male partner's FL associated with sexual satisfaction of wife/female partner?
4. Is FL of husband/male partner associated with sexual satisfaction of husband/male partner?
5. Is there an association between sexual satisfaction of wife/female partner and sexual satisfaction of husband/male partner?



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