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## SEXUAL LIFE DURING COVID-19

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CRISTIAN DELCEA<sup>1\*</sup>, ILINCA BARUH<sup>2</sup>, MOLNÁR HUNOR<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>"Iuliu Hațieganu" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

<sup>2</sup>Tel Aviv University, Israel

<sup>3</sup>Budapest University, Hungary

*\*Corresponding author email: cristian.delcea.cj@gmail.com*

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### Abstract

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has spread rapidly around the world leading to massive changes in various areas. World Health Organization (WHO) has declared this disease a global pandemic in March 2020 causing a range of restrictions and global lockdown. Sexual behaviors have suffered change because of the virus transmission and governmental regulations for people to stay inside their homes. This paper addresses the quality of sexual life during lockdown in Romanian population. We discuss results from an online survey of 395 adults who were asked about their intimate lives, in terms of pornography consumption, solo masturbation and sexual intercourse. We also collected data regarding variables of a good relationship in order to see whether they have an influence over sexual life. We found that a good relationship is strongly connected to quality of sexual life. Our results also show that many people have solo masturbated (72,2%) and have consumed pornography materials (56,5%).

**Key words:** sexual life, COVID-19, sexual behavior.

### INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus has changed the entire world in so many ways. Global deaths and health risks are up, home office has become the new normal, and it opened the door for a more digital lifestyle and a lot of uncertainty. Moreover, it is considered the greatest challenge for the health systems around the world.

Coronavirus disease, the infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, has spread quickly, leading the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. Therefore, many states have responded to the new situation with strict

rules (such as quarantine, transportation restrictions, social distancing, border closure and lockdown) in order to provide care and to stop the transmission of the virus as much as possible. Lockdown and social isolation has had a major impact on people's day to day life, including sexual life. Understanding the pattern of sexual behavior during this time can offer a better insight to pathological behavior and viable solutions as well.

One of the areas that has seen change is pornography industry (Mestre-Bach et al., 2020). As people were spending more time at home, either self-isolating or working at home, the traffic to pornography searches had risen

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\* Corresponding author: 8 Victor Babeș Street, Cluj-Napoca, 400012, Romania, Phone/Fax: +40 264 597 256

compared to previous years. Worldwide traffic to Pornhub was up 11.6% on March 17<sup>th</sup>, with the biggest increases from 2am to 4am (Pornhub Insights, 2020). This information offers a better insight into how people cope with feelings of loneliness and stress. Lockdown also limited casual sex and other behaviours, therefore individuals may use pornography as a coping strategy (Uzieblo K., & Prescott D., 2020).

According to a body of work, pornography may act as a distraction from loneliness, distress, boredom or other pandemic-related negative emotions (Grubbs et al., 2020). More research is needed in order to have a better insight. An online survey in Italy was conducted in order to assess the impact of quarantine due to COVID-19 on psychological and sexual well being. 1515 respondents were involved in the study and 602 (39.74%) respondents answered that quarantine increased auto erotism (masturbation behavior) more than before. In another body of work, 20.8% of participants reported masturbating once per day or more during the past year, 23.2% reported this frequency since the pandemic began. Lockdown has offered a new way to look at relationships, therefore research has been made in order to have a better insight over sexual contact. García-Cruz and Peraza's research showed out that sexual intercourse has not been affected (less frequent in 31%, same frequent in 41% and more frequent in 14; when was compared the Spanish speaking population: less frequent in 23%, same frequent in 39% and more frequent in 7%). Surprisingly, a total of 3.2% vs 9.7% in the Spanish and the English population respectively had sexual relationship with different people from their partner during the quarantine.

## METHOD AND PROCEDURE

### *Method*

In this report, we present the preliminary results of an online survey conducted in Romania. We aimed to take a look at people's sexual lives during quarantine due to COVID-19, by exploring changes in sexual behavior patterns since the pandemic began via

an online survey. We investigated frequency of solo and partnered sexual activities, quality of people's sex lives, as well psychological factors that protect the sexual life in a relationship.

### *Participants*

Our sample is consisted of 399 individuals who responded to our online survey, out of which 4 were eliminated due to inconsistent answers. The final sample consisted of 395 individuals, out of which 102 males (25,8%) and 293 women (74,2%) aged between 18 and 60 years ol. Most of the respondents aged between 18 and 25 years old (74,4%). We collected data regarding the level of studies as well, our participants range from middle school to post doctoral studies. No cookies regarding our participants' identity were stored.

### *Instruments*

We aimed to take a look at people's sexual lives by exploring sexual behavior patterns since the pandemic began via an anonymous online survey. We investigated frequency of solo and partnered sexual activities, quality of people's sex lives, as well as psychological factors that protect the sexual life in a relationship.

### *Procedure*

The sample was drawn through posts on Facebook and the survey was administered via Google Forms between 10<sup>th</sup> of July and 20<sup>th</sup> of August. We used SPSS in order to analyze the data we collected. Data collection was conducted according to our disciplinary and institutional ethical guidelines.

### *Survey results*

How frequent did you have sexual intercourse during pandemic?

Given the new situation, the restrictions have limited social contact. Therefore we were interested to find out about the frequency of sexual intercourse during pandemic. Many participants reported that they had sexual intercourse three times a week (46,1%) or one time a month (30,1%). The remainder either had sexual intercourse one time a day (11,1%) or not at all (12,7%).

How was the quality of your sexual life during pandemic?

Feelings of boredom can appear during a period of time when people are stuck at home. We asked our participants about the quality of sexual life and these are their answers: 48,8% of our sample reported that they are very satisfied with their sexual life and 30,1% reported only good quality of sexual life. Meanwhile 16,7% of our respondents reported an acceptable quality of sexual life and a small number of participants (4,4%) reported that they lacked quality in their sexual life.

### 1. How long sexual acts lasted for?

34,9% of our sample reported longer than 30 minutes intercourse, 24,3% reported 20 minutes intercourse, 24,3% 15 minutes intercourse, 10 minutes 14,4% and 1 minute 2%.

### 2. Have you watched pornography materials during pandemic?

Taking in consideration the rise of pornography searches during pandemic, we were interested to ask our respondents about this topic, in order to have a better insight of their sexual behavior. 56,5% of participants consumed pornography materials, meanwhile 43,5% did not consume. We were also interested in the frequency of sexual behaviors. Therefore, we asked our participants to tell us how often they consume pornography materials. Interestingly, 24,5% males reported that they watch porn every day, 44,1% said that they watch three times a week and 16,7% once a month. The remaining reported that they do not consume any pornographic materials at all. Whereas women 1% reported that they consume pornographic material every day, 11,3% three times a week and 34,8% once a week. The remaining 52,9% reported that they do not watch porn at all. *Table 1* showcases a significant difference between men and women regarding the frequency of consuming porn materials, pearson chi square is (3, N=395) = 134,149, p=0.00.

### 3. Have you solo masturbated during pandemic?

Many participants have solo masturbated during pandemic (72,2%). We asked also about the frequency of solo masturbation and 30,4% reported that they do this everyday, 35,3% three times per week, 25,5% 1 pe luna, 8,8% not at all. Whereas women, 2% have reported that they solo masturbate everyday, 28,7% three times per week, one time per week 35,2, not at all 34,1 %. *Table 1* showcases a significant difference between men and women regarding solo masturbation, pearson chi square is.

In this report we present a Spearman correlational analysis between the concepts that we covered in our survey. We found that *quality of sexual acts* is related to *how often people engage into having sex*  $r=-0,626^{**}$ , ( $p<0.01$ ). Meaning that people who have better sex also engage in sexual acts more frequently. Moreover, *frequency of sexual acts* is strongly associated with *perceived partner's emotional support*  $r= -0,452^{**}$   $p<0.01$ , *sexual compatibility*  $r= -0,485^{**}$   $p<0.0$ , *communication*  $r=-0,405^{**}$ ,  $p<0,01$  and *romantic relationship*  $r=-0,421^{**}$   $p<0.01$ .

Meaning that psychological variables of a healthy relationship are strongly connected to frequency of sexual acts. Furthermore, *partner's emotional support*  $r=0,556^{**}$ ,  $p<0,01$ , *sexual compatibility*  $r=0,627^{**}$ ,  $p<0,01$ , *communication*  $r=0,531^{**}$ ,  $p<0,01$  and *romantic relationship*  $r=0,545^{**}$ ,  $p<0,01$  were also strongly associated with the *quality of sexual life*. We also found that *frequency of consuming pornographic materials* is related to *frequency of solo masturbation*  $r=0,716^{**}$ .

Interestingly, perceived partner's emotional support, sexual compatibility, communication, and romantic relationship, all correlated with each other. A good relationship is related to a good sexual life. Sexual life is an important aspect of romantic relationships; therefore, it can be considered as one of the key contributing factors to relationship satisfaction (Butzer & Campbell, 2008).

**Table 1. Sexual behavior**

	Men Percentage (N)	Women Percentage (N)
<b>Frequency</b>		
Three times per week	49.0% (50)	45.1% (132)
One time per month	28.4% (29)	30.7% (90)
One time per day	13.7% (14)	10.2% (30)
Not at all	8.8% (9)	14% (41)
<b>Quality</b>		
Very good	45.1% (49)	41.3% (121)
Good	31.4% (32)	24.2% (71)
Acceptable	11,8% (12)	15.4% (57)
Not good	2.9% (3)	4.1% (12)
Did not have any sexual acts	8.8 % (9)	15.0% (53)
<b>Duration</b>		
More than 30 minutes	36.3% (37)	34.5% (101)
20 minutes	19.6% (20)	25.9% (76)
15 minutes	32.4% (33)	21.5% (63)
10 minutes	11.8% (12)	15.4% (45)
1 minute	0.0% (0)	2.7% (8)
<b>Pornography (Frequency)</b>		
One time per day	24.5% (25)	1.0% (3)
Three times per week	44.1% (45)	11.3% (33)
One time per month	16.7% (17)	34.8% (102)
Not at all	14.7% (15)	52.9% (100)
<b>SoloMasturbation (Frequency)</b>		
One time per day	30.4% (31)	2.0% (6)
Three times per week	35.3% (36)	28.7% (84)
One time per month	25.5% (26)	35.2% (103)
Not at all	8.8% (9)	34.1% (100)

**Table 2. Bivariate correlates of sexual behavior**

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Frequency of sexual acts	r	-								
	p									
2. Quality of sexual acts	r	-,626**	-							
	p	,000								
3. How long sexual acts last	r	-,042	,156**	-						
	p	,409	,002							
4. Frequency of porn materials	r	-,044	,044	-,061	-					
	p	,387	,381	,225						
5. Frequency of solo masturbation	r	-,140**	,063	-,060	,716**	-				
	p	,005	,212	,233	,000					
6. Partner`s support	r	-,452**	,556**	,090	,090	,202**	-			
	p	,000	,000	,073	,074	,000				
7. Communication	r	-,404**	,531**	,092	,060	,138**	,825**	-		
	p	,000	,000	,067	,212	,006	,000			
8. Sexual compatibility	r	-,447**	,627**	,149**	,161	,195**	,675**	,662**	-	
	p	,000	,000	,003	,001	,000	,000	,000		
9. Romantic relationship	r	-,421**	,545**	,064	,102*	,188**	,829**	,835**	,705**	-
	p	,000	,000	,204	,043	,000	,000	,000	,000	

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)\*; Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)\*\*

## DISCUSSIONS

COVID-19 has radically changed the world and people`s lives. Multiple reports have shown a tremendous increase in pornography consumption since the pandemic has begun (PornHub Insights, 2020), and changes in sexual life (Lehmiller et al., 2020).

In this report we aimed to explore sexual behavior during pandemic, in terms of pornography consumption, solo masturbation and sexual intercourse. We also collected data about psychological variables of a good romantic relationship such as communication, emotional support, sexual compatibility and good relationship overall. We found that quality of sexual acts is related to how often people engage into having sex. We were also interested in finding what psychological factors predict the quality of sexual life. Thus, our results show that communication, partner`s emotional support, sexual compatibility and a good romantic relationship can have a semnificative

influence over quality of sexual life. Taking in consideration the rise of pornography searches during pandemic, we were interested to ask our respondents about this topic, in order to have a better insight of their sexual behavior. 56,5% of participants consumed pornography materials, meanwhile 43,5% did not consume. Our data shows that many participants have solo masturbated during pandemic (72,2%). These findings have also been documented in Lehmiller`s study, where one in five people have consumed pornography and solo masturbated since the pandemic has begun.

More research is needed in order to evaluate sexual behavior during this times. Psychological, social and biological factors should be investigated in order to have a better insight on sexual behavior.

We aknowledge the importance of knowing the nature of impact that COVID-19 has had over people`s sexual behavior. The lack of data regarding sexual behavior prior the pandemic

represents our main limitation. Given the complexity of the situation and the large number of areas in which the COVID-19 pandemic left its mark, it is necessary to study as many aspects as possible and provide answers to as many issues as possible. Although the main focus of most research at the moment is finding a treatment for the virus, it is important to study how people have adapted to this situation.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is highly important to investigate the impact that coronavirus has had over people's day to day life. Previous reports have shown that sex life declined rather than improve (Lehmiller et al, 2020). We found that quality of sexual life is linked to psychological variables of a good relationship, in terms of communication, emotional support, sexual compatibility and good relationship overall. Multiple reports have shown a tremendous increase in pornography consumption since the pandemic has begun (PornHub Insights, 2020). Our report shows that 56,5% of participants consumed pornography materials, meanwhile 43,5% did not consume. We were also interested in the frequency of sexual behaviors. Interestingly, 24,5% males reported that they watch porn every day. Our findings show that many participants have solo masturbated. It is an interesting matter to take a closer look at how people cope with feelings of uncertainty and loneliness. By understanding factors associated with sexual improvement we can provide solutions for emergency situations (Rus M., Sandu L. M., Tănase T., Boumediene S., Delcea C., 2020 and 12. Delcea C, Chirilă V-I., Săucea A-M., 2020).

### Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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