

Integrative Literature Review of Sexual Expression among Older Adults

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ABSTRACT

Sexuality encompasses a holistic perspective of human beings. A meaningful personal life among older adults constitutes a basic need and right. Few studies have examined in detail the sexuality of older people. Sexuality in older adults as a concept is generally avoided, and when it is discussed, it is riddled with myths and misconceptions. Several barriers prevent older people from expressing their sexuality.

The bleak understanding of sexual expressions among older adults is imperative in modern civilization. This study explored empirical evidence of sexual expressions among older adults and developed an initial conceptual model.

The emergent conceptual model of older adult sexual expression is trifocal. The first component focus of the model characterizes Physical and Active Sexual Expressions among older adults as dichotomous. Erogenous and emotive expressions are still evident despite age. The erotic dimension fulfills the sexual need to express oneself, the emotive represents individuality, personhood, and safety. The second component focus is the Affective Sexual Expressions which are multifaceted interpersonal elements.

The varying degrees of relationships may take sexual desires to a heightened degree of emotional expressions of care and affection. The last component focus is the Psycho-social Sexual Expressions which are autonomous behaviors. Making choices for one is to pursue possibilities, be empowered, be happy, and stay positive.

Sexuality is still relevant in old age. Its expression can be individualistic, caring, affectionate, empowering, affirmative, happy, and positive.

Introduction

Sexuality as defined by WHO encompasses the holistic perspective of the concept. It goes beyond the sexual act or relationship. Sexuality and its expression among older adults may seem to be taboo in some cultures. In the Philippines, few studies have examined in detail the sexuality of older people. This may be due to culture. When people talk about sexuality among older adults, it creates myriad reactions such as disgust, embarrassment, or neglect. In the context of Filipinos, it may likewise be similarly situated. Central to a meaningful personal life, sexuality, and its expression on a fundamental level, constitute basic human needs and rights. The expression of one self-including sexuality is a right well stipulated in the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Being a right it becomes a daunting woe that is more palpable from the perspective of the older adults.

Some other main issues and key myths that have been conceptualized about older people's sexuality include a lack of sexual desire that accompanies aging; the physical unattractiveness and undesirability of older people, which is particularly evident about gender; the idea that it is shameful and perverse for older people to engage in sexual activity (Meydan, 2018). These issues may further aggravate the need to express at the fundamental level. The expression may also be intertwined with society's expectations of older adults.

In an earlier study conducted by Ginsberg et al., (2005), it revealed that older adults had the following sexual preferences and behaviors: touching or holding hands, embracing, or hugging, kissing, mutual stroking, masturbating, and intercourse. These practices may be acceptable in some societies. In the study, older adults with partners had and wanted the last three representing the sexual act.

Abraham Maslow's conceptualization of the Hierarchy of needs identified sex as a part of physiologic needs. But it wasn't clear about sex as a physiologic need with a clear distinction between age limit and its appropriateness. This perspective elucidates that sex is for everyone, regardless of age. The notion that sexuality is a lifelong process becomes contrary to popular thinking of people including health care providers (Kennedy et al., 1997). As a result of this notion, sexuality and the elderly are generally avoided, and when it is discussed, it is riddled with myths and misconceptions. Buying into these myths, or simply the lack of awareness, makes it difficult to handle, or even discuss problems of sexuality in the elderly. Reasons for health professionals' reluctance to initiate conversations about the sexual health of their patients include believing myths and stereotypes regarding sexuality and older people; a fear that they may offend their patient (Gott et al., 2004), and confidence in one's ability to discuss sex-related issues (Reynolds & Magnan, 2005).

In a study conducted by Mcauliffe et al., (2007) it was mentioned that several barriers prevent older people from expressing their sexuality, and many of these are influenced by the health professionals and services that care for them. Older people are not impervious to myths on sexuality and aging, and consequently, treatment-seeking behavior is often inhibited by attributing sexual problems solely to aging, worrying about how one will be perceived by health professionals when expressing a sexual concern, and shame, fear, and embarrassment (Gott et al., 2004). Yet despite any embarrassment older people may feel discussing sexual issues, most older people

would welcome the opportunity to discuss sexual concerns with their health professional (Nusbaum et al.,2004) and believe that being asked about sexual needs and functions should be part of clinical care (Lemieux et al., 2004).

The preoccupation with sexuality and beliefs about what is “normal” or “appropriate” sexual behavior remains firmly entrenched in society, despite popular exposure. The limitations in all the facets of life make it more difficult for them to express it. The expression of sexuality goes beyond one sexual orientation. It includes notions of intimacy where there is a close association, familiarity, and shared personal knowledge between people, suggesting a degree of caring, sympathy, or emotional understanding. (Meydan, 2018) This is beyond sexual orientation and determinism.

The notion of sexual identity or sexual orientation adds complex dimensions, which may include political and community elements of how people relate to one another. In the Filipino culture, this may seem to be discouraging as culture may play a part in the expression of sexuality. On the other hand, the expression of one’s sexuality appears to be unfounded in many cultures specifically among Filipinos. Willis (2016) noted a greater fluidity in sexuality over the life span, further complicating the definitions of sexual identities, including gender identities, which may not coincide with sexual orientation.

In the Philippines, where there is a robust heteronormative culture, few studies feature age and sexual orientation intersections. When expressing sexual desires or concerns, older adults confront much stigma from their own families and the healthcare system (Dhingra et al., 2016). In the study of Guevara (2016) on life satisfaction among older Filipino sexual minorities and their experiences of support, the author posited that there were generations of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE). As a result, it has caused lifelong feelings of unworthiness, insecurity, and loneliness, which came from experiences of gender-based discrimination that caused their deprivation of the sense of belonging to a family. Rao et al. (2015) further emphasized that there was a shared sense of guilt, fear, and shame surrounding sex in anticipation of unfavorable reactions from family members, especially in an older person's children. For fear of being criticized and excluded, older individuals who adopt these values and standards are typically ashamed of their bodies and are less likely to communicate their sexual wants and desires

Studies have indicated that young adults have accepting, tolerant, open-minded, and positive attitudes toward sexuality in later life (Allen and Roberto 2009; Freeman et al. 2014). This perspective may seem to be a welcoming development however, expression of sexuality may also entail tolerance and acceptance both at the core of the concept. The growing tolerant behaviors of people in many cultures do not entail acceptance. This means that we may be seeing older adults’ expression of one’s sexuality, yet we may not accept it fully as a behavior because of the norms set at the backdrop of one’s aging process.

The gap in the tolerance and acceptance becomes obtruse in a cultural perspective. Likewise, this chiasm is emanating from the bleak understanding of the expression of sexuality among this population group. Thus, the purpose of this Integrative Literature Review is to

synthesize studies done on expression of sexuality among older adults and provide empirical evidence of the expression common to this population group.

Statement of the Problem

The bleak understanding of sexual expressions among older adults is imperative in modern civilization. This study explored empirical evidence of sexual expressions among older adults and developed an initial conceptual model. It will address the following research questions:

1. What is the distribution of articles as to the year of publication?
2. What are the similarities and differences in the purpose of the reviewed studies?
3. What common sexual expressions as to categories and subcategories may be identified in the development of a preliminary conceptual framework of sexual expression among older adults?
4. What emergent Sexual Expression Conceptual Model may be proposed and operationalized?

Research Paradigm

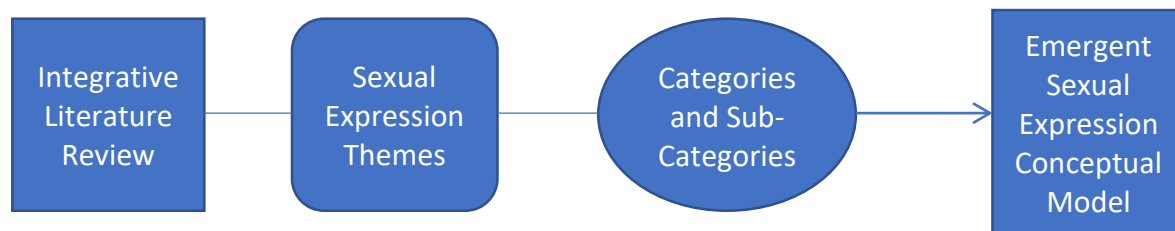


Figure 1: Developmental Process of an Emergent Sexual Expression Conceptual Model

The development of an emergent sexual expression conceptual model was facilitated by an integrative literature review of the sexual expressions of older adults. The synthesis and analysis of these shared sexual expressions have derived themes and categories. The categorization of the themes further yielded an emergent sexual expression model. Operationalization of the core categories was carried out by thorough analysis based on Cooper's Methodology of Literature Review.

It integrated and generalized findings across units, treatments, outcomes, and settings; to resolve a debate within a field, or to bridge the language used across fields. (Randolph, 2009) It is an often-used review technique in which the primary goal is to integrate quantitative outcomes across studies.

Methodology

Data Collection Procedure

The search strategy was facilitated by coming up with inclusion and exclusion criteria. Only research papers were considered, and all papers that did not contain the sexual expression in elderly or older adults” or “Sexuality” in the article abstract or title were discarded (even if Sexuality was listed as a keyword for the paper). Part of the filter was the year of publication, only those articles from 2015 to 2022 were included in the review.

A comprehensive and systematic search was made utilizing ProQuest and Google Scholar CINAHL, EBSCO, and other databases. The keywords elderly and sexual expression were combined with each of the other keywords: expression of sexuality, older adults, and sexual manifestation using AND, OR to broaden and focus the search. Reference lists of relevant articles were also reviewed to identify further literature.

Inclusion criteria: The plethora of literature that was identified required narrow inclusion and exclusion criteria to limit the scope of the study. The focus of this study was limited to Sexual Expression in the older adults. To present a current perspective, research published from 2015 to 2022 was eligible for inclusion in the review.

Exclusion criteria: Studies before 2015 and studies not published in English were excluded from the review. Using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, articles were excluded in three stages. Cumming (2008) suggested that this can be done initially by reviewing the title, then the abstract, and lastly by reading the complete article.

Integrative Literature Review Process

The PQRS Framework of Cohen (1991 in Cronin 2008) was utilized as a process of synthesizing. PQRS (Preview, Question, Read, and Summarize) is a simple method that keeps the researcher focused and consistent. In the Preview, the initial articles were reduced to a final sample. Questioning entailed the utilization of the indexing and summary system. Reading prompted the researcher to supply the answers to the indexing grid or matrix. The final stage of appraisal was summarizing which included key thoughts, comments, strengths, and weaknesses of the article.

Data collection included creating a coding sheet formatted for easy extraction of data. The indexing or summary matrix of this study was a modification of the existing methodology as proposed by several authors like Patrick and Munro (2004), Polit and Beck (2004), Timmins and McCabe, (2005), Burns and Grove (2007) in Cronin, (2008). The index consisted of the following headings: Title, Author and Year, Journal, Purpose of the Study, Data Collection Method, Major Findings, Recommendations, and Thoughts and Comments. Each study was systematically read and analyzed using the coding sheet to record the data which was entered into a Microsoft Word spreadsheet. In this way, the data was organized into a matrix (Appendix 1) which simplified the data synthesis process. Data were compared item by item and similar data were grouped in categories. These categories will be compared and analyzed to identify emerging themes and patterns or trends. The approach to the process of analysis will be thematic derivation. Carnwell

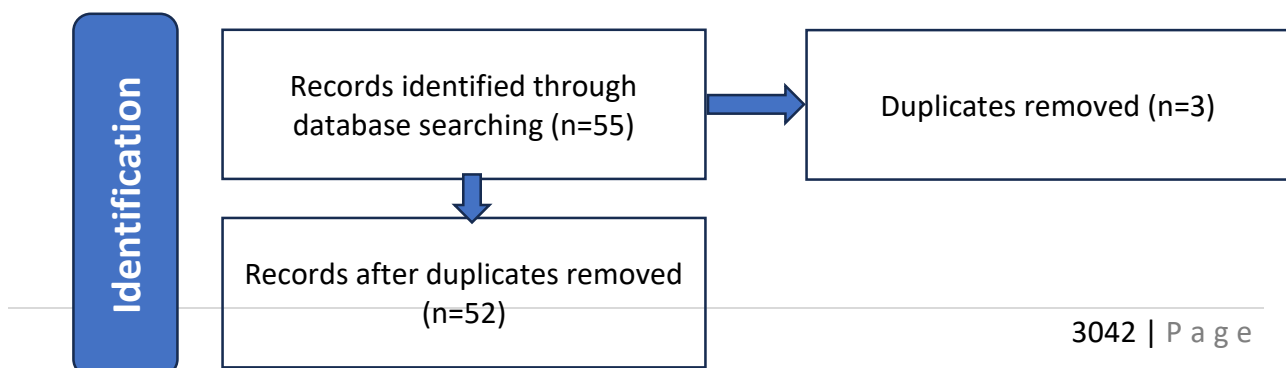
(2001 in Cronin 2008) proposed several ways of framing the review, thematic, where data from the literature are classified into core categories or sub-categories, chronologically, through exploration and examination. For this study, a thematic approach was utilized. This is an approach that describes and discusses distinct themes resulting in category derivation. Aside from it being the most popular, it is fitting for this study since it allows the integration of theoretical and conceptual studies. Finally, findings were synthesized, and a model was conceptualized. Operationalization of the conceptual themes was developed.

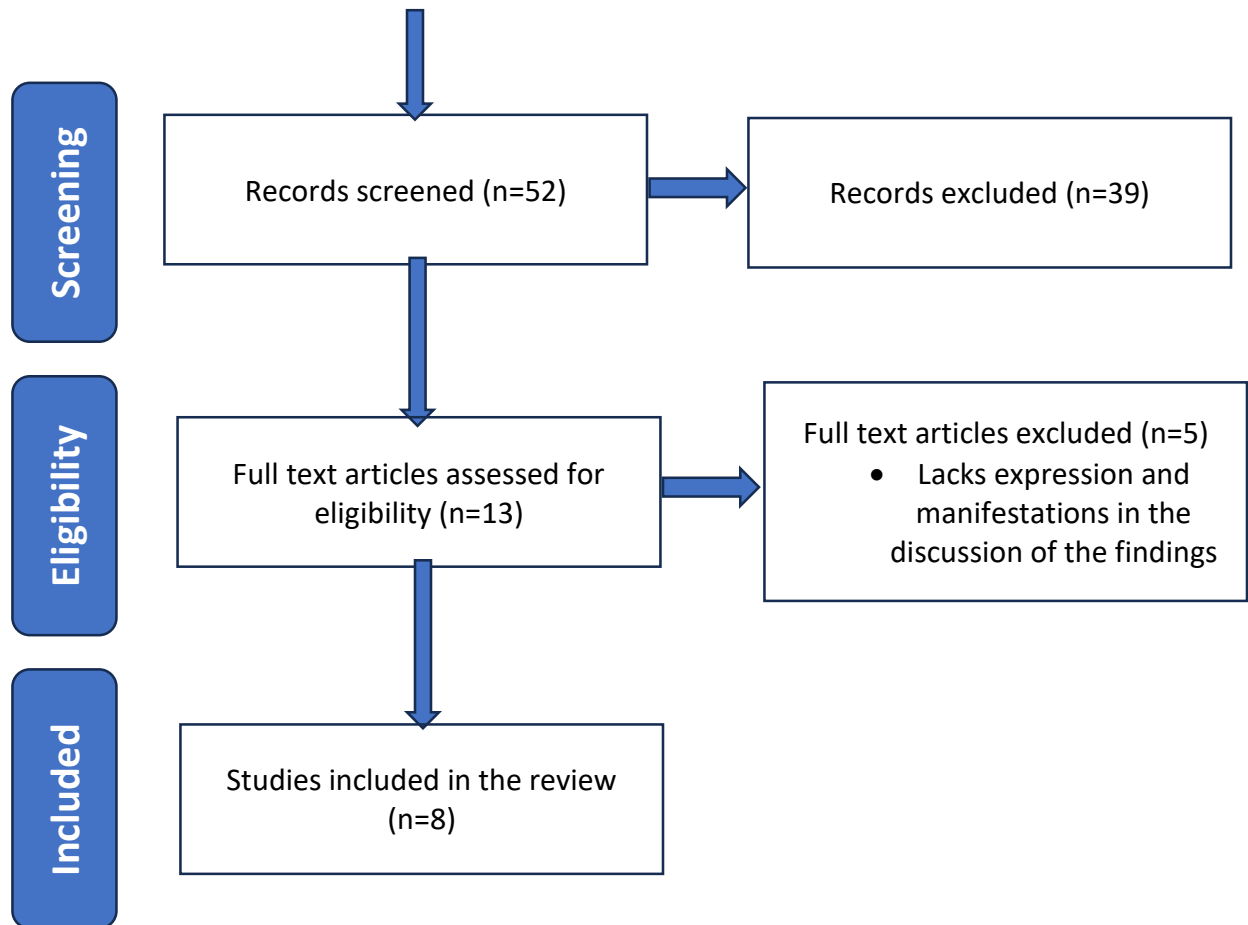
Results and Findings

For the study, only research papers were considered, and all papers that did not contain the terms “expressions of sexuality” or “manifestations of sexuality ” AND “Older adults OR Elderly OR “later life” OR “senile” OR “old age” OR “senescence” OR “senior” OR “geriatrics” in the article abstract or title were discarded (even if sexuality, expression and manifestations were listed as a keyword of the paper). Part of the filter is the year of publication, only those articles from 2015 to 2022 were included in the review.

As a result of these filters, 55 papers were initially examined per year, so the sample initially consisted of 13 articles. Of these articles, a total of five (5) articles were not included in the analysis after reading the entire paper, it lacks expressions and manifestations in the discussion of the findings. Eight (8) were the total sample and were composed of conceptual and theoretical studies.

Search Number	Search Terms
1	“expressions of sexuality” AND (“older adults” OR “elderly” OR “later life” OR “senile” OR “old age” OR “senescence” OR “senior” or “geriatrics”)
2	“manifestations of sexuality” AND (“older adults” OR “elderly” OR “later life” OR “senile” OR “old age” OR “senescence” OR “senior” or “geriatrics”)
3	S1 AND (“2015 – 2022”)
4	S2 AND (“2015 – 2022”)





The systematic extraction of data is an essential stage in an integrative review. Of the 55 articles generated with the search strategy inclusion and exclusion criteria, a framework to review it systematically and critically was utilized.

The total eight (8) samples were all studies relating to sexual expression of the elderly. This review categorized the studies into four major categories: Year of publication, Purpose, Data Collection Method, and Sexual Expression with similarities and differences as variables for synthesis.

Categories of Review

Year and Number of Articles: this category of the review was essential to show the distribution of studies made on the topic from the period of 2015-2022.

Table 1: Distribution of Sample Articles as to Year of Publication (n=8)

Year of Publication	2015	2016	2017	2019	2020	2021
Number of Articles	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)	2 (25%)	2 (25%)	1 (12.5%)	1 (12.5%)

The marginal studies done on the sexual expression of older adults is manifested by the number of articles generated from the review. There was likewise a gap noted in the year of conduct of the studies. No study on sexual expression was generated from the search in 2018 and likewise for 2022. This can suggest that the concept of sexual expression in the context of Asian culture remains an eluded area of interest and it may appear to be culture-driven as emphasized by Dhingra in 2016. Likewise, this can be attributed to the family's high expectations from the older adults including the shared sense of guilt, fear, and shame surrounding sex in anticipation of unfavorable reactions from family members of the older adults as pointed out by Rao in 2015.

Purpose of the Studies: this category was likewise essential in the initial review since it elucidated the motivation of the conduct of the study. The purpose of any study likewise will determine or spell out data collection procedures that were applied and enable it to fulfill the purpose of the investigation. In this category, the similarities and differences as variables have guided the review.

Similarities

The review revealed six (6) similar purposes of the study. It explored to understand health status and its relation to sexual experience and activity. Two (2) each or 25% each of the samples were from 2019 and 2017 studies respectively. There is one (1) or 16.7% each from studies in 2015, 2016, 2020 and 2021. The finding suggests that the exploration of sexual experience and activity is better understood in the context of the older adult's health status.

The study by Erens et.al. (2019) pointed out that 44% of the older adults in the study among British have reported health conditions affected their sex life, thus limiting their sexual expression. It further suggests that there might be a link between health status and the sexual expression and abilities of older adults.

Differences

Differences in the purpose of the study were noted from the studies in 2017. One (1) or 50% of the studies have delved into the perspectives on how older adults' sexual lives can be best supported and improved and one (1) or 50% described the sexuality education preference of older adults.

The study on perspectives pointed out a shift from social and cultural norms in normalizing sex in older age. (Fileborn, et.al., 2017) The other study explored preferred sources of information including the Internet, the media, health care providers, books, and workshops or discussion groups. A substantial number of participants did not actively seek information on sex. For those who had, these educational endeavors could profoundly shape their sexual practices. (Fileborn, et.al., 2017)

These findings suggest that older adult's sexual lives and expression may be improved and enhanced when norms are viewed from sociocultural components of one's sexuality, regardless of identity. However, a similarity was noted in the location of the study. Surprisingly, these two studies were done in Australia. This can suggest that sexual lives and expression have other dimensions and may likewise be improved and can be addressed by education.

Data Collection Method: This category elucidated the process of how the study collected the data necessary to achieve the purpose. The data collection method further showed the rigor of the investigation. It had provided an initial capsulation of the findings of the investigation. In this category similarities and differences as variables were likewise considered.

Similarities

Six (6) or (75%) out of the eight (8) samples have utilized qualitative inquiry to understand sexual expression among older adults. Qualitative studies tend to be holistic, striving for an understanding of the whole. (Polit, 2015) It likewise requires researchers to become intensely involved, remaining in the field for lengthy periods. Grounded theory as a qualitative tradition tries to account for people's actions from the perspective of those involved. Grounded theory researchers seek to understand the actions by first discovering the main concern or problem and then the individual behavior that is designed to resolve it. (Polit, 2015)

Noteworthy, from the studies, there is one (1) or 16.7% that had utilized grounded theory. It utilized netnographic approach. This approach is more focused on reflections and data provided by online communities (Kozinet, 1998) As a method it utilizes naturalistic than personal interviews, focus groups, surveys, and experiments, which the qualities are largely influenced by the researcher. In addition, participants may alter their reactions/answers when involved in the interviews, focus groups and surveys. The main advantage of netnography is that individuals reveal information, including sensitive details, unasked and voluntarily online naturally, and the netnographer could gain this organic information through observation. The study followed a full year of activity in 14 leading English language-based seniors' online communities. The final dataset of 2,534 sex-related posts was analyzed using constructivist grounded theory. The findings reflect the multiple roles of sex in older adulthood, highlighting its importance, leisurely qualities, and benefits. It highlighted various constraints limiting sexual function and expression. (Berdychevsky, et.al, 2016)

The finding of an exploratory qualitative study revealed sexual expression is a desire to look and feel good. Maintaining one's physical appearance was described as a way of being true to one's self and outwardly presenting that self to the world. (Brassolotto et.al., 2020) The other significant findings revolve around autonomy, privacy, and communication dynamics to meet sexual expression.

Using a review, Srinivasan (2019) found out biases by other people including healthcare providers hurt sexual expression. The sexual expression of older adults is influenced by diverse psychosocial and biological determinants including ageist beliefs. The study however did not specify what kind or type of review was utilized to be able to generate biases and the determinants identified.

Corroborating the findings of Brassolotto (2020) on the physicality of sexual expression, Roney (2015) utilizing a structured interview found that sexual activities including cuddling and holding hands are means of expression.

The finding on the similarity of the data collection method proves that for a concept like sexual expression that needs elucidation, qualitative traditions may provide a better standpoint.

Differences

One (1) study (16.7%) utilized Descriptive Analytical, a quantitative approach. Descriptive research classifies, describes, compares, and measures data. Meanwhile, analytical research focuses on cause and effect. (Omair, 2015) So, this design has described the cause and effect of health status and sexual expression. In the analytical study, it was found that sexuality is directly related to quality of life (QoL) with relevant implications over the years, contributing to self-knowledge, well-being, pleasure, self-esteem, health maintenance, mental and general satisfaction with life. (Souza, et.al, 2021)

The last study utilized mixed mixed-method design. Mixed method researchers believed that many areas of inquiry can be enriched, and the evidence may be enhanced through the judicious triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data. The findings of the mixed method study suggest that the dogma of the equation between sex and penetration is strongly held among older persons, as evidenced by different means of expressing sexuality in response to health-related issues and claimed positive implications for sexual satisfaction as a result. Further, it was revealed that many people find it difficult to diversify their sexual forms of expression later in age. Established forms of sexual expression for men and women in longer partnerships are likely to have been impacted by social norms in their youth when alternative behaviors to vaginal intercourse were less common. (Erens, et.al., 2019)

This finding suggests that while the concept of sexual expression may be elucidated further by qualitative traditions, the use of analytical descriptive design may also provide better understanding of the cause-and-effect relationship. Mixed method design may provide enrichment of the concept with the use of triangulation.

Sexual Expression Categorization

The ILR has revealed that sexual expression among the elderly is varied. The diversity of sexual expression themes ranges from Activity, Affective, and Control. Derived subcategories are Physical, Affective, and Psycho-social Expressions.

Table 2: Sexual Expression Core Category and Sub-Categories from ILR (n=8)

Themes	Sub Categories and Definition	Core Category and Definition
		Diverse Sexual Expression Experiences of sexual expression relates to varying acts, identities and ways of existing
Sexual and Non Sexual Activity Active sexual experiences and activities including better and frequent sexual intercourse; individual sexual practices like masturbation (common than partnered sex); cuddling, hugging and holding hands; eroticism; kissing; petting or fondling including foreplay; being independent and active	Physical (Activity) Expression Relates to sexual activity in expression. The activity may be manifested by an intercourse, masturbatory behavior, individual and independent sexual practices	
Emotional Expression Affective experiences relating to companionship, friendship, support and partnership; tenderness and care; altruism; supportive relationship; emotional intimacy	Affective (Emotional) Expression Relates to varying emotional degrees of attachment from companionship to support and intimacy	
Control Expression Control over lives including sexual identities and rights; relates to personal styles like hair style; social activities; privacy to expression; autonomy; gratitude; positive self-image	Psycho-social (Control) Expression Relates to varying degrees of control from personal, social and psychological expression of independence	

Key themes emerged from the constant comparison of derived codes from the coding sheet. The iterative process was judiciously used to derive the sub-categories and core categories. The core category of diverse sexual expression relating to acts, identities, and existence was derived.

The subcategories of the diversity of sexual expression on Physical Sexual Expression represent activities that are carried out to express and achieve one's sexual desires. The expression may have benefits but a decline in physical capability and or illness may also result in relational strains.

The following activities derived from the review constituting the **Physical Sexual Expression** are:

- (1) Masturbation is a deliberate erotic stimulation. It is the process of manipulating one's genital organs, whether a penis or clitoris for self-stimulating removing the requirement for a partner. (Sam, 2013) Likewise, the act is self-fulfilling an orgasm without the help of another, typically through observation of elicited material representing masturbatory behavior among older adults.

In the study of Brassolotto (2020), participants mentioned that: *"they use sex toys nightly"*

The use of sex toys as a means to stimulate self erotically may be seen as a masturbatory behavior where a partner is not needed. This act as an active sexual expression of older adults may be a result of the absence of a partner. Notably, widowed older adults in the study of Brassolotto in 2020 had highlighted it.

This was elucidated in the statement of several participants when they claimed: *"our sexual lives ended when our spouses died"*, thus the need for sex toys to be able to fulfill a need and thereby represent an active sexual expression.

The finding was particularly similar to the study of Souza (2021) wherein older adults in the study have remained active in their sexual experiences, including individual masturbation practices.

- (2) Cuddling is an act of hugging, embracing to keep warm; lie close or snug. Cuddling is a form of touch that can be both sexual and nonsexual. (James-Brown, 2023) There is a neurochemical reason why cuddling can help individuals. In response to the physical act of cuddling, the body releases hormones like oxytocin and dopamine that create feelings of closeness. Oxytocin, often called the 'cuddle hormone' or 'love hormone,' promotes feelings of wellness, pleasure, and overall happiness, as emphasized by James-Brown. It is the main neurochemical that allows us to bond with other people, especially a loved one.

Touch as a form of cuddling can be a non-sexual act. This was underscored by one participant-resident in the study of Brassolotto (2020) when a resident male mentioned:

And [staff member] came into the room one evening and I was crying. He said, 'What's wrong?' I said, 'I miss being touched.' 'You get touched all the time,' he said. I said, 'Yes, to be washed, to be bathed. Never just to be touched.' ... [The staff member then hugged the resident in a long embrace]. And for those two minutes I was in heaven. Because you do that little expression, and at that time it was an expression of sexuality, but also an expression of being human. ... Oh my God, it was glorious. I knew he had a partner, but I was crying tears of joy. I told him, 'you don't know what this means to me'

This expression of physical touch was identified as an important part of sexual expression beyond the sexual act itself. Likewise, older adults indicated that physical touch, emotional intimacy, and sexual acts were still very much a part of their lives, representing a myriad of sexual expressions.

Supporting the claim of James-Brown (2023) on the benefit of sexual expression in the form of touch and emotional intimacy, touch whether that is a sexual or non-sexual act can provide a sense of personhood, safety, and or belonging, manifestations beyond the sexual act.

This was elucidated in the statement of a participant-resident concerning touch in the study of Brassolotto (2020):

"The emotional intimacy just makes me feel more as a person"

The ill effect of deterioration in health among older adults may also contribute to a decline in sexual expression and may affect intimacy. This was evident in the study of Erens (2019) when sexual activity had ceased because of health issues on the part of one or another partner, the loss of physical intimacy had clear consequences for the relationship:

"I haven't had sex for 18 months and that's because my husband's got very bad arthritis and he takes beta-blockers, and because of that he finds it very difficult. [...] I really do miss the closeness of the cuddles before and the cuddles after. I feel really sorry for my husband, I think he misses it more than I do"

- (3) Eroticism is the quality of being sexually arousing or pleasurable or the condition of being sexually aroused. A preoccupation with or susceptibility to sexual excitement. The use of sexually arousing themes, images, or suggestions in entertainment or the arts. (APA, 2023)

Eroticism is the way humans experience sexuality as a self-sufficient mental activity. (Fellmann, 2016) He further emphasized that the constant disposition for recreational rather than procreational sex makes eroticism a medium of human creativity and humanization.

Fellmann's claim was supported by the findings of the study of Brassolotto in 2020 when one participant-resident won an award years ago for an erotic film he created, serving as an erotic expression of humanness and creativity.

- (4) Kissing is the activity of making contact with the lips, usually with another individual as a sign of friendship or affection. The kiss may involve lip contact with any part of the body and with varying degrees of pressure. Mouth-to-mouth kissing may include an extension of the tongues as in the French kiss. (APA, 2023)

In all of the studies, kissing was a sexual expression among older adults.

- (5) Petting is a sexual activity that may not continue to orgasm or maybe foreplay engaged in before orgasm. Petting behavior may include kissing, caressing the breasts and genitals, oral sex, and placing the genitals in apposition. (APA, 2023)

In the study of Erens (2019) participants mentioned: *‘half hour on the bed every afternoon’* meant enjoying kissing, cuddling and petting.

Like kissing, petting as an expression is characterized by manipulation resulting to erotic stimulation and may also be considered as a foreplay.

- (6) Active is vigorous, lively, or energetic. (APA, 2023) This expression may not be necessarily sexual in orientation but may represent the ability of the older adult to do self-fulfilling activities. The fulfillment of an accomplishment of a task or activity may represent expression.

Maintaining one's physical appearance was described as a means of being able to outwardly present the self to the world by so doing, represents the ability of the older adult to achieve self-care. Two participants in the study of Brassoletto (2020) emphasized this:

“I wear makeup. I make my hair nice”

“I brush my teeth, I put on my cologne... I always like to smell nice”

- (7) Being Independent is the freedom from the influence or control of other individuals or groups. (APA, 2023) Likewise, this expression relates to the ability of the older adult to accomplish activities reflecting their abilities.

The findings on the varied physical and active sexual expressions revealed a dichotomy. Dichotomous sexual and non-sexual expression can also be two-fold: erogenous and emotive. The erotic dimension fulfills the sexual need to express oneself, the emotive represents individuality, personhood, and safety.

Affective Sexual Expression, relates to varying emotional degrees of attachment from companionship to support and intimacy. This sub-category may also be equated to emotional sexual expression which can range from the following:

- (1) A companionship is a relationship in which both parties support each other emotionally without having sexual interest. This type of relationship can be incredibly beneficial

because it allows both people to rely on the other for comfort and positive reinforcement. (Okutsu, 2023)

It can provide a sense of stability and security that is essential for happiness and well-being. It can also help boost self-esteem by giving a sense of being valued and loved. It is about spending time with someone who makes you happy and makes you feel good. It is a connection based on trust and mutual respect.

It was observed in the study of Souza (2021) that older adults experience their sexuality and its expression better in affective relationships. This dimension refers to the qualitative aspects of sexuality such as companionship, love, complicity, affection, friendship, support, partnership, among others.

- (2) Friendship a voluntary relationship between two or more people that is relatively long-lasting and in which those involved tend to be concerned with meeting the others' needs and interests as well as satisfying their own desires. Friendships frequently develop through shared experiences in which the people involved learn that their association with one another is mutually gratifying. (APA, 2023)
- (3) Support refers to the provision of assistance and comfort (Oxford Dictionary, 2023) while partnership is a continuing and often committed association between two or more people. (APA, 2023)
- (4) Tenderness refers to gentleness and the quality of being kind, while care refers to concern given to another person (Oxford Dictionary, 2023)
- (5) Altruism is an unselfish behavior that provides benefit to others at some cost to the individual. In humans, it covers a wide range of behaviors, including volunteerism and martyrdom, but the degree to which such behaviors are legitimate without egoistic motivation is subject to debate. (APA, 2023)

The results of this review are in agreement with other studies aside from Souza's investigation. (2020) These are the studies of Humboldt (2020) and Quieroz, (2015), in which they identified the different ways that older adults express their sexuality, among which altruism, affection, attention, attractiveness, and respect prevailed.

- (6) A supportive relationship is a continuing and often committed association between two or more people, as in a family, friendship, marriage, partnership, or other interpersonal link in which the participants have some degree of influence on each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions. (APA, 2023)
- (7) Emotional intimacy an interpersonal state of extreme emotional closeness is such that each party's personal space can be entered by any of the other parties without causing discomfort to that person. Intimacy characterizes close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationships and requires the parties to have detailed knowledge or deep understanding of each other. (APA, 2023)

The study of Brassolotto (2020) elucidated that emotional intimacy is the hallmark of physical and active sexual expression among older adults. This was evident in the statement of a participant resident who emphasized nonsexual touch, particularly hug:

Because you do that little expression (hug from the staff), and at that time it was an expression of sexuality, but also an expression of being human. ...

The findings on the varied affective sexual expressions revealed a multifaceted interpersonal expression. The varying degrees of relationships may take sexual desire to a heightened degree of emotional expressions of care and affection.

The last sub-category derived from the core category of diverse sexual expression, psycho-social expression relates to varying degrees of control from the personal, social, and psychological expression of independence. This can likewise be seen as a means of control over one's sexual expression.

Diverse **Psycho-social Sexual Expressions** were evident in:

- (1) Sexual identities and rights: refer to an individual's sexual orientation. (APA, 2023)
Identities can be closely intertwined with social expectations.

The identity and upholding it is a desire to look and feel good. Maintaining one's physical appearance was described as a way of being true to one's self and outwardly presenting that self to the world. Two participants in the study of Brassolotto (2020) emphasized this:

"I wear makeup. I make my hair nice when I go out, because I want the world to meet who I am, and I am me...I'm going to be the best me I can be to the world"

"The girls do my hair, I brush my teeth, I put on my cologne... I always like to smell nice"

This is similarly equated to the choices older adults make. Choice represents one's right and the accompanying autonomous behavior. This includes making decisions about what to wear, how one's hair is styled, which social activities one participates in, and more. By making these choices, older adults can retain a sense of sexual identity and autonomy

An indication of autonomy can be through personal choice. This is exemplified in this statement made by a family member in the study of Brassolotto (2020):

Sometimes staff would be like, 'oh, are you sure you want to wear that? Because that's a little more difficult [to put on].' And it's like, 'yeah, she's sure she wants to wear that. It makes her feel pretty'

- (2) Social activities: are any human activity seen in terms of its social context. Individual or group activities directed to achieving benefits for the community or a segment of the population (APA, 2023)

In the study of Brassolotto (2020) one participant mentioned in the context of social activity like eating in mess hall: *“it can be exciting to sit and chat with new people and/or their visitors”*.

- (3) Privacy to expression is the state in which an individual’s or a group’s desired level of social interaction is not exceeded. The right to control (psychologically and physically) others’ access to one’s personal world, such as by regulating others’ input through use of physical or other barriers (e.g., doors, partitions) and by regulating one’s own output in communication with others. (APA, 2023)

- (4) Autonomy is a state of independence and self-determination in an individual, a group, or a society (APA, 2023)

Being able to make choices for themselves meant being able to pursue possibilities, which can be exciting and a manifestation of autonomous behavior.

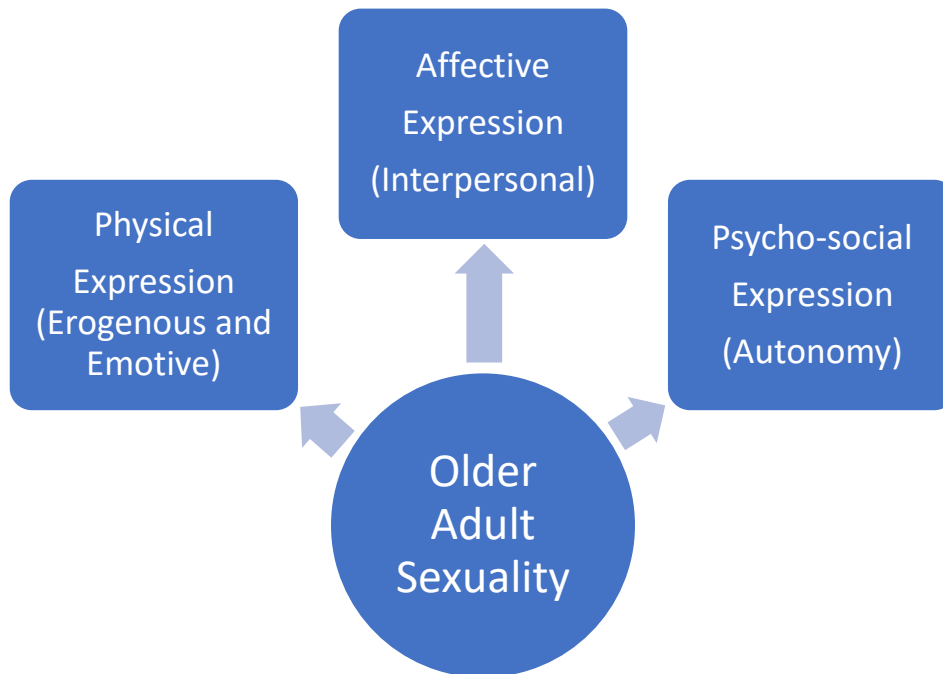
One resident in the study of Brassolotto (2020) mentioned how it was disappointing to not have any say about with whom he sat at mealtimes. He emphasized that *“it can be exciting to sit and chat with new people and/or their visitors”*.

- (5) Gratitude is a sense of thankfulness and happiness in response to receiving a gift, either a tangible benefit (e.g., a present, favor) or a non-tangible given by someone (APA, 2023)
- (6) A positive self-image is one’s view or concept of oneself. Self-image is a crucial aspect of an individual’s personality that can determine the success of relationships and a sense of general well-being. (APA, 2023)

This theme can closely be linked to sexual identity and orientation. As sexuality is as important in old age as in any other age group and its expression can be empowering, affirmative, happy and positive.

The findings of this review had highlighted older adults’ varied psycho-social sexual expression. It may be varied but it revealed a strong contention of autonomous behavior. Making choices for themselves meant being able to pursue possibilities and empowering, achieving affirmation, being happy and positive.

Emergent Sexual Expression Conceptual Model



Operationalization of the Conceptual Model of Older Adult Sexual Expression

The emergent conceptual model of older adult sexual expression is trifocal.

The first component focus of the model characterizes Physical and Active Sexual Expressions among older adults as dichotomous. Erogenous and emotive expressions are still evident despite age. The erotic dimension fulfills the sexual need to express oneself, the emotive represents individuality, personhood, and safety.

The second component focus is the Affective Sexual Expressions which are multifaceted interpersonal elements. The varying degrees of relationships may take sexual desires to a heightened degree of emotional expressions of care and affection.

The last component focus is the Psycho-social Sexual Expressions which are autonomous behaviors. Making choices for one is to pursue possibilities, be empowered, be happy, and stay positive.

Conclusion

Sexual expression may take on new forms in a continuum, it continues to be a fundamental part of human life and flourishing for older adults.

Sexuality is still relevant in old age. As in any other age group, its expression can be individualistic, caring, affectionate, empowering, affirmative, happy, and positive.

Recommendations

The emergent trifocal conceptual model of older adults' sexual expression may be utilized as an operating framework to provide the fundamental sexual expression needs among the population group. Guidelines may be drawn from the significant findings about policies and procedures in an institution that caters to older adults. Family members may likewise consider the findings in the care of their older adults.

An empirical endeavor to test the conceptual model may be beneficial to further understand the myriad of sexual expressions among the population group.

The need to investigate the cultural component of sexual expression may be a fertile source of evidence that can be used to improve the emergent framework.

Appendix 1

Title	Author, Journal and Year	Purpose	Data Collection Method	Major Findings (focused on Sexual Expression)	Recommendations	Comments and Thoughts

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