

MWL Cheung 張偉良
 PSF Yip 葉兆輝
 SYS Fan 范瑩孫
 TH Lam 林大慶

Marital satisfaction among Hong Kong couples

Key Messages

1. Interest in sex was highly predictive of sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex in marriage.
2. For husbands, age was negatively correlated with the frequency of a married couple having sex.
3. For wives, holding a full-time job resulted in a lower frequency of sex.
4. Marriage counsellors should pay attention to the different needs of both individuals in a couple.

Introduction

Marriage satisfaction is associated with sexual satisfaction, and frequency of sex is related to marital sexual satisfaction.^{1,2} In western societies, common predictors of sexual satisfaction in marriage are age and medical condition of the couples. Nonetheless, such empirical studies in Chinese societies are limited.

This study aimed to address whether the predictors of sexual satisfaction within marriage in western societies (marital sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex) were applicable in a Chinese society. The research questions were: (1) what were the factors that influence sexual satisfaction for married Hong Kong Chinese couples?; (2) what were the factors that influence frequency of sex for married Hong Kong Chinese couples?; and (3) what were similarities and differences in the factors associated with marital sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex among married Hong Kong Chinese couples?

Methods

Path analysis was used to test the research hypotheses. The main advantage of path analysis over regression analysis is that predictors for sexual satisfaction and the frequency of sex can be tested simultaneously to compare similarities and differences.

A large dataset from the eighth Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) Survey conducted by the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong in 2002 was used. Marriage and sexual satisfaction were two key variables. Stratified sampling was used to randomly select participants to ensure that the sample characteristics were similar to those at the societal level.

About 1600 married or cohabiting women aged 15 to 49 years were successfully interviewed. The spouses of these women were invited to participate. The total number of pairs of couples was 1124. Missing data were dealt with using the full information maximum likelihood method.³ If the data were missing at random, maximum likelihood could provide efficient and unbiased estimates on the parameters.

A question "are you satisfied with your sexual life?" was used to measure the sexual satisfaction of the husbands and wives. The response scale was from 'very unsatisfied' (1) to 'very satisfied' (5). The answers given by the wives on the question "in the past 30 days, how many times have you had sex?" were used as proxy on the frequency of sex, which was assumed to be the same for the couples. Variables were grouped into several categories. (1) Demographic variables included age, place of birth (Hong Kong SAR vs Mainland China), educational level, having a full-time work, and having been married more than once. These variables were measured separately for the husbands and wives. (2) Family variables included family income, number of children, and years of marriage. These variables were assumed to be the same for the couples. (3) Medical history related to sex included having sought medical help related to sex (husbands and wives) and having an abortion (wives only). (4) The psychological variable, namely 'interest in sex', was measured separately for husbands and wives.

Hong Kong Med J 2012;18(Suppl 6):S25-6

Department of Psychology, National University of Singapore, Singapore
 MWL Cheung
 Department of Social Work and Social Administration, and Hong Kong Jockey Club Centre for Suicide Research and Prevention, University of Hong Kong
 PSF Yip
 Family Planning Association of Hong Kong
 SYS Fan
 Department of Community Medicine, School of Public Health, University of Hong Kong
 TH Lam

HHSRF project number: 02030581

Principal applicant and corresponding author:
 Dr Mike WL Cheung
 Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore, Block AS6, Level 3, 11 Law Link, Singapore 117570
 Tel: (65) 6516 3702
 Fax: (65) 6773 1843
 Email: mikewlcheung@nus.edu.sg

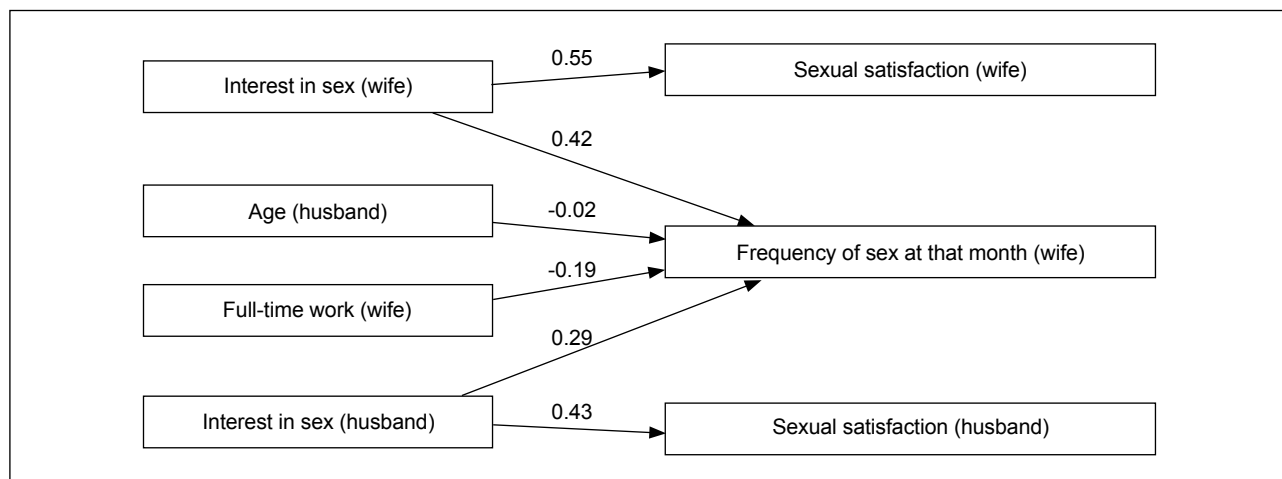


Fig. Path model of sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex*

* Coefficients represent the unstandardised path coefficients significant at $\alpha=0.01$. Non-significant variables are not included.

Results

A path model with three dependent variables was fitted. The significant paths ($\alpha=0.01$) of the unstandardised coefficients are shown in the Figure. The residuals of the dependent variables were significant suggesting that the predictors were not sufficient to explain all the association among the predictors.

Interest in sex was the strongest predictor in predicting sexual satisfaction of husbands and wives and of the frequency of sex. It was the only significant predictor for both sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex. For the husbands, age was negatively correlated with frequency of sex, but not with sexual satisfaction. This effect was not observed in the wives. Wives with a full-time job had sex less frequently than those without a full-time job. This effect was not observed in the husbands.

Discussion

This is the first empirical study on sexuality within marriage in Hong Kong. One possible reason for a lower frequency of sex in wives with a full-time job is that wives in Hong Kong are expected to be responsible for household chores and most parenting duties. Even if they have full-time employment, their involvement in parenting and domestic duties remains high. This may lead to high levels of stress.

Readers may refer to the study by Cheung et al⁴ for more details.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Health and Health Services Research Fund, Food and Health Bureau, Hong Kong SAR Government (#02030581). We thank the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong for permitting the use the KAP survey data. We also thank Mr Paul WC Wong and Ms KY Liu for their valuable inputs. The results of this study have been published in: Cheung MW, Wong PW, Liu KY, Yip PS, Fan SY, Lam TH. A study of sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex among Hong Kong Chinese couples. *J Sex Res* 2008;45:129-39. Reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis (<http://www.tandfonline.com>).

References

1. Yabiku ST, Gager CT. Sexual frequency and the stability of marital and cohabiting unions. *J Marriage Fam* 2009;71:983-1000.
2. Timm TM, Keiley MK. The effects of differentiation of self, adult attachment, and sexual communication on sexual and marital satisfaction: a path analysis. *J Sex Marital Ther* 2011;37:206-23.
3. Enders CK. *Applied missing data analysis*. New York: Guilford Press; 2010.
4. Cheung MW, Wong PW, Liu KY, Yip PS, Fan SY, Lam TH. A study of sexual satisfaction and frequency of sex among Hong Kong Chinese couples. *J Sex Res* 2008;45:129-39.