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# Norwegian elders tops in masturbation

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More than 90 per cent of Norwegian men between the ages of 60 and 75 are sexually active, as are almost 75 per cent of Norwegian women.

Few people study the sex lives of the elderly. But once they do, they find some surprises, says Bente Træen, a professor of health psychology at the University of Oslo.

“Researchers are like other people. We are raised to think of sexuality as something for the young and the good looking,” she said. Now, she says, they know better.

Træen worked with group of European researchers to study sex among the European elderly.

## Many masturbate

Træen and researchers from five other countries have compared the sexual activity of people between the ages of 60 and 75 in Norway, Denmark, Belgium and Portugal in a major study. Now the team is beginning to publish its results.

She says the group’s findings are unexpected, even for people who are accustomed to studying sexual habits.

“I am surprised at how many people are sexually active. It’s not that I’m comparing what we found to previous studies, because there aren’t that many other studies. It’s more about the societal myths we have about the elderly and sex,” she says.

Many people in the study reported that they masturbate and often have intercourse. What was also surprising was that the elderly in the study were generally satisfied with their sexuality, according to Træen.

Norwegian men and women were at the top of the list when it came to masturbation.

Fully 65 per cent of men and 40 per cent of women said they had masturbated in the previous month.

In contrast, very few Portuguese men and women say they have masturbated.

## Lots of intercourse in Portugal

Men in Portugal, on the other hand, are at the top when it comes to having intercourse, according to the survey.

The Portuguese say they have intercourse one to three times a week. This is far more frequently than men in Norway, Denmark and Belgium. In these three countries, men report having intercourse about two to three times a month.

Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that Portuguese men are most satisfied with their sex life of all the men in

the survey.

Nordic women in the survey reported being most satisfied with their sex life.

Træen interprets these results as reflecting the gender equality situation in the different countries.

"In Norway, women are much more used to negotiating with regards to their own sexuality. The Mediterranean countries are much more traditional when it comes to gender roles. The typical Portuguese man has access to a partner that he has intercourse with — and he is very satisfied with that. While we in the north may have intercourse less often and masturbate more, intercourse is what really matters in Portugal," Træen said.

### **Poorer data from Portugal**

Træen and the other researchers first conducted recruitment interviews by phone to find a representative selection of both sexually active and inactive individuals for the survey. These individuals then were sent a questionnaire by mail.

However, there was a big difference in participation from the different countries.

In Norway, 68 per cent agreed to participate. In Portugal, only a quarter of respondents contacted by phone said they would be willing to participate in the written questionnaire. Many people also changed their minds after saying yes on the phone. Træen thinks this makes for some uncertainty regarding the data from Portugal.

"The response rate in Norway was much higher than we had thought it would be. I actually expected more people to drop out of the survey. But the response rate in Denmark and Belgium response was also quite good. It's possible that people in Portugal found some questions offensive, although we obviously tried to avoid this problem," she said.

### **Desire diminishes, but does not disappear**

Træen was also the main author of another recent study on older people's sexuality. Here, researchers asked 75-year-olds in the same four countries about their sex drive as compared to ten years ago. Most people responded that it was a little less or the same.

"Sexual desire diminishes with age, but that does not mean it disappears. How satisfied you are with your sex life changes as you age. As a young person, you most appreciate the 'gymnastic side' of sex and pleasure related to genital contact. When you are older it's more about having a comfortable relationship with someone, and being touched and kissed," she said.

There is an important difference between the sexes here. Health is often what decides if men still have sexual desire, while for women, interpersonal relationships are the most decisive in determining their level of desire.

### **Health care systems must recognize need for sex**

This new information on older people's sexual habits shatters old myths, Træen says.

"Older people are not asexual. That means that sex must be higher on the agenda as an issue in the planning of health care for older adults," she said.

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 [It may make people uncomfortable to think about it, but older people actually have an active sex life, according to a new survey that has compared the sexual habits of the elderly in four European countries. \(Photo: Photographee.eu / Shutterstock / NTB scanpix\)](#) [7]

 [University of Oslo Professor of Health Psychology Bente Træen is heading a major project investigating the sex lives of the elderly. What her team is finding is changing perceptions about the importance of sex for older people. \(Photo: UiO\)](#) [8]

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[Bente Træen, et al.: Sexual Activity and Sexual Satisfaction Among Older Adults in Four European Countries, Archives of Sexual Behavior, July 2018.](#) [13]

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