



RESEARCH REPORT

Lifetime Sexual Partners

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Research Project:

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This report was done to summarize available literature and evidence on the research question. None of the sources were selected in favor of a particular organization, intervention, stance, or opinion.

Abstract

Importance: The Institute of Sexual Health seeks to provide people worldwide with medically accurate information to make well-educated decisions about their sexual health and to educate public health professionals in their efforts to reduce sexually transmitted infections

Objective: The purpose of this review was to gain knowledge on how many sexual partners men and women have during their lifetimes and before marriage by geographic location around the world.

Design, Setting, Participants: A systematic literature review (SLR) was used to gain knowledge on sexual partner trends around the world by reviewing the most up to date available literature. The strategies used key words to search for literature regarding Global and US numbers, and the articles were selected and reviewed by an MPH practicum student to ensure relevant data was collected. The key words in searches include “number of sexual partners globally, number of sex partners in the United States, number of sex partners by country, number of sex partner for men, number of sex partners for women, average amount of sex partners for men and women globally, how many sex partners do men and women have, number of sex partners worldwide, number of sex partners before marriage, premarital sexual partners, sex partners before marriage”.

Main Outcome and Measures: The practicum student used Statista database and conducted a search which found 1 study by Durex relevant to the topic related to sexual partners worldwide out of 275 that were reviewed for eligibility with 737 that did not meet criteria. In addition, internet searches using key words found relevant data from the CDC regarding number of sexual partners, Durex, which is a contraceptive company, BedBible, which provides product review on intimate products, World Population review, which provides global population and data and a survey done by Superdrug, which is a health and beauty retailer in the United Kingdom.

Results: The review found that average sex partners for 41 countries including the United States. Turkey listed as the highest ranked for number of sexual partners and lowest ranked country being India. However, recent articles conducting these studies used Durex’s 2005 study, excluding the survey done by Superdrug and the CDC. It was also found that the CDC data and Superdrug survey of sexual partners conflicted with the global data. CDC’s average sexual partners for women was 4.3 and for men, 6.3. Results indicate that more research would need to be done to get more updated data on this topic and more reliable tools should be used to collect data. No results for premarital sex partners were found.

Conclusion: The review found conflicting data when comparing U.S. average and global average. The numbers were also self-reported, which can cause bias where research found that men and women inflate or deflate the number of sexual partners. The data was also limited in age where it included the ages of men and women participating in these studies of 25 years to 49 years of age. This effectively excludes younger individuals who have had multiple sexual partners and individuals who are over 49 years of age. Additionally, more recent literature regarding sexual partners were found to have used Durex data from 2005.

Introduction

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are a global health issue worldwide with the global burden rising at an alarming rate. In recent years, associated emerging diseases and infections have been observed. Limited data sources and gaps in the literature led the Medical Institute of Sexual Health to a systemic literature review to gain understand of the role of lifetime sexual partners on the rising numbers of STIs. The organizations collecting and reporting STI data include the World Health Organization (WHO), Pan American Health Organization, Center for Disease Control (CDC) State and local health departments in the United States, and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

According to the World Health Organization, more than 1 million sexually transmitted infections (STI's) are acquired everyday worldwide.¹ Most STI's are asymptomatic, which means that most do not produce or show any symptoms that indicate infection.¹ Not only do STI's have a profound impact on sexual health, but STI's can also have a severe impact reproductive health.¹ In 2020, the World Health Organization estimated that there are 374 million new infections with 1 of the 4 most common being chlamydia with 127 million cases, 87 million gonorrhea infections, 6 million syphilis infections and 156 million Trichomoniasis infections.¹ More than 490 million people are estimated to be living with genital herpes and an estimated 300 million women have acquired an HPV (Human Papilloma Virus), which is the primary cause of cervical cancer in women and anal cancer in men.¹ Additionally, an estimated 269 million people live with chronic hepatitis B globally.¹

Lifetime Sexual Partners

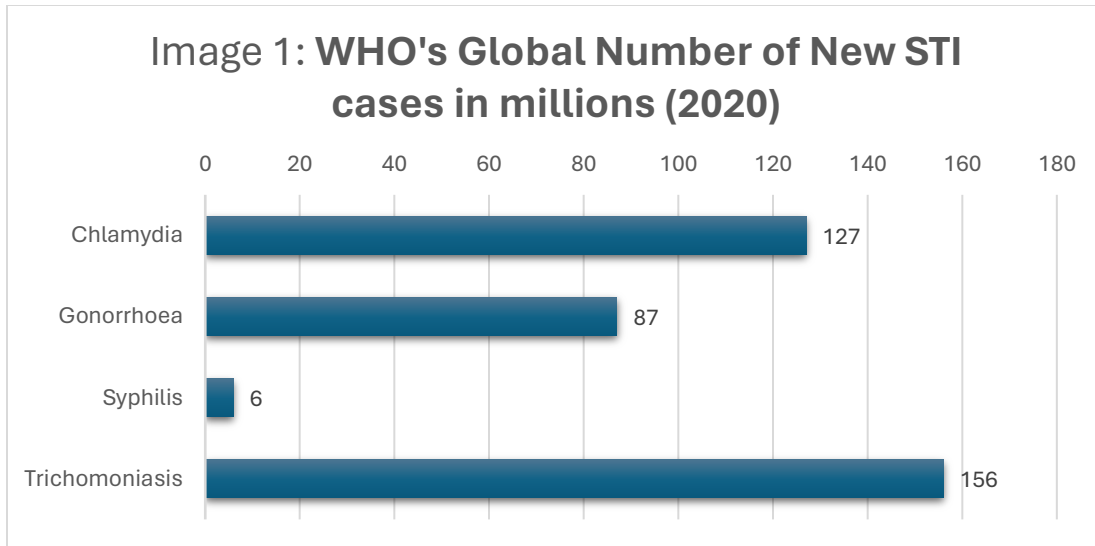


Image 1 shows the number of new cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis and trichomoniasis in 2020. STI's can have severe consequences that go beyond the impact of acquiring the infection itself.¹ Herpes, gonorrhea, and syphilis can increase a person's risk of Human immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) acquisition.¹ Mother-to-child transmission of an STI can result in stillbirth, neonatal death, low birthweight, sepsis, congenital deformities, prematurity and neonatal conjunctivitis.¹ HPV infection causes cervical and other types of cancers and hepatitis B has resulted in an estimated 820,000 deaths in 2019 due to cirrhosis.¹ Cirrhosis is liver damage that can lead to liver failure and hepatocellular carcinoma, a type of liver cancer that occurs primary in people with cirrhosis due to hepatitis B.¹ Gonorrhea and chlamydia cause pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility in women.¹

The Medical Institute for Sexual Health seeks to provide people worldwide with medically accurate information to make well-educated decisions about their sexual health and to educate public health professionals in their efforts to reduce sexually transmitted infections. The data obtained in the review will be used to educate public health professionals in their efforts to reduce sexually transmitted infections. The question the review seeks to answer is what is

Lifetime Sexual Partners

number of sexual partners for men and women have during their lifetimes and how many sexual partners men and women have before marriage by geographic location worldwide.

STI Rates in the United States

The most recent annual surveillance report of 2022 was released from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on January 30, 2024. The report presented an alarming rise of STI cases with over 2.5 million cases of syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia in the United States.² Syphilis increased by 80 percent and congenital syphilis increased by 183 percent since 2018.² Congenital syphilis is the transmission of the infection from pregnant mother to her baby during the pregnancy. Congenital syphilis can cause significant health threats to the infant including miscarriage, stillbirth, prematurity, low birth weight and the death of an infant shortly after birth.² Even more worrisome is that Congenital syphilis has had an overall increase of 937 percent in the last 10 years.²

Although these reports help public health professionals understand which populations are most affected by sexually transmitted infections, the data fails to explain why. Why do some individuals acquire STI's while some don't and why do some groups have higher rates than others. However, transmission can be influenced by many factors including changing sexual behaviors, misusing, or not using barrier protection, or increasing sexual partners. It remains difficult to pinpoint the trends exactly. The number of sexual partners in a person's lifetime is an important factor in transmission due to the probability of coming in contact with an infected person at one time or another or if an individual decides to have their first sexual experience with someone who has had multiple sexual partners, which can also amplify transmission.³ Additionally, recent literature claims that the number of sexual partners is increasing for both men and women due to factors such as people having sex at a much younger age, people either

Lifetime Sexual Partners

delaying marriage, having children and long-term relationships, while access to partners has become easier due to social media and dating/hookup apps.³

Methods

The objective of this research was to perform a systemic literature review of available reports, studies, and any other available literature regarding the average number of sexual partners men and women have in their lifetimes time and before marriage. The measurable target was to analyze 120 to 190 available resources. The attainable and realistic goal was to complete 90 to 100 reviews related to the topic with consideration that there may be limited research with specific data on the amount of sexual partners men and women have in their lifetimes. The project timeline consisted of 120 hours of research. Additionally, to ensure a high-quality review of the literature several procedures were followed. The PRISMA model was used as a framework to conduct the literature review. An initial sample of the types of literature that was available regarding the link between increased sex partners and sexually transmitted disease. The Statista database was also be used to obtain specific data regarding the number of sexual partners in men in women in their lifetimes, and sexual partners before marriage by geographical location. Statista is a business data platform that gathers existing data from over 22,500 sources and conducts its own research to prepare analyses across industries and geographies.⁴ It can also be used to find relevant facts and data in health and statistics on diseases. The PRISMA 2020 checklist was used in the methods section to ensure the quality of the results.

The search conducted included specific “key words” such as number of sexual partners globally, number of sex partners in the United States, number of sex partners by country, number of sex partners for men, number of sex partners for women, average amount of sex partners for men and women globally, how many sex partners do men and women have, number of sex

Lifetime Sexual Partners

partners worldwide, number of sex partners before marriage, premarital sexual partners, sex partners before marriage, number of sex partners before marriage. The search terms used in Statista included sexual partners to get specific statistics discussing the total average number of sexual partners by country and using the term premarital sex to get specific the statistics on sex before marriage. Searches were also narrowed down to include gender and specific countries. Additionally, general internet searches were done using the same key words to obtain updated government data regarding the estimated number of sexual partners in the United States.

Results

Table 1.

Top 12 Countries with the Highest Number of Sexual partners	
Country	Sexual Partners
Turkey	14.5
Australia	13.3
New Zealand	13.2
Iceland	13.0
South Africa	12.5
Finland	12.4
Norway	12.1
Italy	11.8
Sweden	11.8
Switzerland	11.1
Ireland	11.1
Unites States	10.7
Data from World Population Review 2024 ⁵	

Recent Numbers from the World Population Review 2024 found that the top 12 countries had the highest numbers of sexual partners included in figure 2. Similarly, data obtained from Statista from a 2005 study done by Durex listed the number of sexual partners reported by 41 countries listed below on table 2. The Durex study consisted of more than 310,000 people from 41 countries surveying sexual attitudes and behavior. The questions in the survey regarding

Lifetime Sexual Partners

number of sexual partners was intended to provide a global perspective on the association between number of sexual partners and rates of unprotected sex.⁶ The citizens of Turkey were reported to have the highest average number of sexual partners during the course of their lifetimes with an average of 14 partners on average with residents from Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Iceland claiming the top five of average sexual partners. Countries with the lowest number of sexual partners including India, China, and Vietnam.

Table 2.

Table 2: Reported Number of Sexual Partners by Country	
Country	Average Sexual Partners
Turkey	14.5
Australia	13.3
New Zealand	13.2
South Africa	12.5
Ice land	13
Finland	12.4
Norway	12.1
Italy	11.8
Sweden	11.8
Ireland	11.1
Switzerland	11.1
United States	10.7
Canada	10.7
Greece	10.6
Israel	10.6
Thailand	10.6
Japan	10.2
Chile	10.1
United Kingdom	9.8
Serbia & Montenegro	10.1
Austria	9.7
Denmark	9.3
Bulgaria	9.1
Czech Republic	9
France	8.1
Croatia	7.5
Belgium	7.5
Singapore	7.2

Lifetime Sexual Partners

Netherlands	7
Portugal	7
Taiwan	6.6
Spain	6.1
Poland	6
Germany	5.8
Malaysia	5.8
Slovakia	5.4
Indonesia	5.1
Hong Kong	3.7
Vietnam	3.2
China	3.1
India	3
Data from Statista ⁶ ^b Based on Durex data 2005	

Additionally, a research study that was done by the BedBible Research Center shown on table 4 and 5 from 68,846 US survey respondents from 1972 to 2023 and an additional dataset, surveyed 317,182 respondents to determine country by country differences of average sexual partners by age, gender, and country.⁷ The key findings of this study listed in table 4 include the average number of sexual partners by age and gender and the country ranked by promiscuity on table 5.

Table 4

Average number of sexual partners between men and women	All	Men	Women
By age 20	6.5	7.9	5.1
By age 30	8.8	11.3	6.2
By age 40	10.1	14.1	6.1
By age 60	11.3	16.2	6.3
Data from BedBible Research Center Based on data from 1972 to 2023 ⁷			

Table 5.

Lifetime Sexual Partners

Rank #	Country	Lifetime Sexual Partners
1	Turkey	14.5
2	Australia	13.3
2	New Zealand	13.2
4	Iceland	13
5	South Africa	12.5
6	Finland	12.4
7	Norway	12.1
8	Italy	11.8
9	Sweden	11.8
10	Ireland	11.1
11	Switzerland	11.1
12	Canada	10.7
13	United States	10.7
14	Greece	10.6
15	Israel	10.6
16	Thailand	10.6
17	Japan	10.2
18	Chile	10.1
19	Serbia & Montenegro	10.1
20	United Kingdom	9.8
21	Austria	9.7
22	Denmark	9.3
23	Bulgaria	9.1
24	Czech Republic	9

Lifetime Sexual Partners

25	France	8.1
26	Croatia	7.5
27	Belgium	7.5
28	Singapore	7.2
29	Netherlands	7
30	Portugal	7
31	Taiwan	6.6
32	Spain	6.1
33	Poland	6
34	Germany	5.8
35	Malaysia	5.8
36	Slovakia	5.4
37	Indonesia	5.1
38	Hong Kong	3.7
39	Vietnam	3.2
40	China	3.1
41	India	3
--	Global Average	9
Data from BedBible Research Center Based on data from 1972 to 2023 ⁷		

Sexual partners in the United States

The World Population Review and research obtained from Durex has listed the United States to have an average of 10 to 11 partners over their lifetimes as shown in table 1 and 2.

However, conflicting Statistics from the CDC's National Survey of Family Growth found that

Lifetime Sexual Partners

the median number of opposite sexual partners in a lifetime among sexually experienced women and men between the ages of 25 to 49 years of age.⁸

Table 3

Table 3: 2015-2019 Median Number of opposite sex partners among sexually experienced women and men aged 25-49 years	
Women	4.3
Men	6.3
Data from CDC Based on 2015-2019 data from NSFG ⁸	

Another survey done by a U.K. based health and beauty retailer surveyed 2,000 men and women in the United States and Europe to explain their thoughts on sexual histories and found the average of sexual partners varied by gender and location with the United states average of sexual partners at 7.2.⁹ People from Louisiana averaged nearly six time as many partners with 15.7 as residents of Utah at 2.6.⁹ The study also highlights that 62 percent of Utah’s residents are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which promotes abstinence until marriage to explain these differences.⁹ The survey also reported that 41 percent of men and 32 percent of women admitted to lying about their sexual history.⁹

Discussion

It is common for individuals to have multiple sexual partners throughout their lifetimes. However, the number can significantly vary country by country or state by state when reviewing numbers in the United States. The number of sexual partners can also be impacted by cultural and social norms, religion and gender. Recent global data found that Turkey is placed as the most promiscuous country at 14.5 based on the collected data. Well above the United States where the number of sexual partners is 10.7. The data shows that the top 5 countries with the most sexual

Lifetime Sexual Partners

partners in their lifetimes between the ages of 24 to 44 are Turkey, Australia New Zealand, Iceland, and South Africa. While India and China were ranked with the least number of sexual partners. These differences are typically due to cultural differences and the importance of abstaining before marriage and strict marriage rules. The numbers also show that the global average of sexual partners is 9 and women are averaged to have 68 percent fewer partners in their lifetimes. The data also shows that the older you are, the more sexual partners you are likely to have. In comparison to these results, the CDC listed that men's average of sexual partners is 6.3 and women is 4.3.

Limitations

Although these numbers may seem logical. Specifically, with the sexual partner difference between men and women. The numbers are self-reported, which can cause bias. People may need to inflate or deflate the number for various reasons. Limitations also includes the ages of men and women due to the starting ages of those participating in these studies of 25 years to 49 years of age. This effectively excludes younger individuals who have had multiple sexual partners over 49 years of age. Other limitations on the data include the exclusion of unhoused individuals, person who are incarcerated and those living in military bases in the United States and the inability to provide State of local estimates in the US.

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