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Senior Adult Sexuality Scales

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The SASS (Senior Adult Sexuality Scales) is a multidimensional measurement instrument suitable for assessing senior adult (60+) sexual attitudes and sexual interests, and a specific set of sexual activities.

Description

The SASS consists of five parts. Part I, the first Biographical Information section, includes 14 questions that gather general descriptive information (see the Exhibit).

Part II, the Sexual Attitude Scale, consists of 16 items that address approval or disapproval of various sexually related activities or concepts (e.g., premarital and extramarital sexual activity, abortion, contraception, and masturbation). It is intended to measure the extent to which the sexual orientation of an individual is liberal or conservative.

Part III, the Sexual Interest Scale, refers to a concept of “interest,” encompassing a feeling of concern for, desire for, or preference for a particular set of sexual activities, whether or not one is a participant. The interest subscales (Experimental and Traditional) were developed as a quantitative measure of the degree of interest in a fairly comprehensive set of sexual activities. The items were selected from a taxonomy of items that represent the range of sexual activities commonly practiced or of interest to middle-aged to older adults.

The Experimental subscale consists of 10 items covering sexual behaviors involving partner choices (e.g., group sex, sex with considerably younger partners, nonmarital sex). The Traditional subscale consists of seven items covering intimate sexual behaviors such as kissing, petting, intercourse, orgasm, and so forth. Interest levels are based on desire for a specific activity if it was readily available whenever one wanted it.

Part IV, the Sexual Activities Scale, was designed to assess the construct sexual activity. Sexual activity refers to the wide range of activities or behaviors involved in sexual expression and interaction. This scale was developed to measure a limited range of specific sexual activities such as sexual intercourse, cuddling, petting, sexual initiation, orgasm, and so on.

Part V, Biographical Information II, asks the respondents the degree to which their participation in athletic, social, and sexual activities has changed from their 30s or 40s as compared to now. Also included here are questions that will allow for an identification of the sexual orientation of the sample and/or individual, as well as space for the respondents to comment on the total instrument.

The 68-item preliminary questionnaire was developed from an initial pool of 100 items selected from extant measures applicable to other subpopulations and from colleagues’ suggestions. Face validity, clarity, and applicability to the desired constructs were determined by five professionals and five senior adults, who assigned the items to three hypothesized underlying factors (attitudes, interests, activities).

To substantiate that the scales representing the hypothesized factors were psychometrically sound, data from 314 respondents were subjected to a principal axis factor analysis with squared multiple correlation coefficients as initial estimates of communality. The criteria used to determine the number of factors included an examination of the proportion of variance (POV) accounted for, the number of factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, and an assessment of the substantive interpretability of the factors. Solutions were explored with one to six factors. The best solution found was a four-factor solution, accounting for 51% of the common factor variance.

The result of factor analyses performed on the three preliminary scales separately—to determine if any interpretable pattern was being masked by an overall solution—further substantiated acceptance of the combined solution. The existence of the hypothesized constructs was strongly substantiated in that each factor emerged separately. The only modification to the initial expectation is that two factors explaining sexual interest emerged rather than one, hence the Traditional and Experimental subscales.

The retained solution was rotated orthogonally and obliquely. The oblique solution revealed no meaningful correlations among the factors; thus, the orthogonal solution was used to interpret the factors and to select the final items to be included in the scales and subscales.

Because a minimum criterion of .4 on the factor loadings was considered meaningful or substantial, the items included in the final scales had factor loadings of .4 or more on one factor and less than .4 on all other factors. If two items were redundant, then other theoretical criteria were applied. Each final scale consisted of a homogeneous set of items influenced by one major factor (Allen & Yen, 1979).

Response Mode and Timing

Respondents are instructed to answer the questions by circling an appropriate number or placing a check in a space provided. On the average, 30 to 40 minutes are required to complete the entire questionnaire.

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Scoring

Each item on the Sexual Attitude Scale (Part II) is scored on a 7-point scale where 1 = Strongly Agree and 7 = Strongly Disagree. When the entire scale is summed, low scores will represent a more liberal sexual attitude orientation and high scores a more conservative sexual attitude orientation. A liberal or conservative attitude of the group toward a particular item can also be assessed.

Each item on the Sexual Interest Scale (Part III, both Experimental and Traditional subscales) is scored on a 7-point scale where 7 = Very Interested and 1 = Not Interested. All items are worded so that a high score represents a high degree of interest, and a low score represents a low degree of interest. To check for consistency of responses, some items were worded differently, although addressing the same concerns. The items on each subscale can be added and comparisons made between groups. The subscales should be administered as one scale but scored separately because collapsing them into one scale may result in invalid and inappropriate conclusions.

The items on the Sexual Activities Scale (Part IV) are rated in a somewhat new format successfully tested in a major study of teen behavior by the Centers for Disease Control (Kirby, Alter, & Scales, 1979). The question format is “How often do you . . . ?” The respondent is instructed to fill in the correct number on the line provided, next to times per day, times per week, times per month, times per year, or never.

Applying statistical procedures to the raw data to arrive at the common denominator of weekly, monthly, or yearly participation is necessary for comparisons. When this is completed, the scores can be added. A high number reflects more frequent sexual activity. Individual items can be examined separately, describing frequency for a particular activity. The total frequency for any one individual or one item is best discussed as a relative comparison to some group or individual. The Sexual Activities Scale should be used by researchers interested only in the quantity of activity.

Reliability

Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients were calculated for each of the scales of the SASS (Nunnally, 1978). The Sexual Attitude Scale and the Sexual Interest Scale, Part A and Part B, have respectable reliabilities of .87, .90, and .84, respectively. The Sexual Activities Scale has a somewhat lower reliability coefficient of .66.

Validity

Face validity and content validity were substantiated by a professional and senior adult review. Construct validity is strongly confirmed by the results of the factor analysis, as the items in each scale and subscale intercorrelated and loaded separately on the respective factor, with no overlap. The orthogonal solution, as the most appropriate solution to explain the data, showed the distinctness of the factors, which acts as further confirmation of construct validity.

The SASS was used in a study of age-segregated and age-integrated living arrangements of senior adults as they relate to their sexual attitudes, interest, and activities. The data across scales were collected on the SASS and subjected to a discriminant function analysis where significant differences were detected between the groups (Weinstein, 1984). Research of this nature serves to support the construct validity of the scales.

Other Information

The scales have been discussed in journal articles, including Weinstein and Rosen (1988, 1989). The full SASS (preliminary and final versions) is available from Estelle Weinstein.

References

Exhibit

**Senior Adult Sexuality Scales**

*Biographical Information 1 (Part I)*

*Instructions:* Please answer all questions by placing a check or a statement in the appropriate space provided.

1. Relationship Status:
   - Married _____
   - Committed Partners _____
   - Remarried _____
   - Single _____
   - Divorced _____
   - Widowed _____
   - Separated _____
   - Other (specify) _____

2. If remarried or in a committed partnership:
   - More than 10 years _____
   - Less than 10 years _____

3. How many children do you have?
   - None _____
   - One _____
   - Two _____
   - Three _____
   - Four or More _____

4. Education:
   - Completed Elementary School _____
   - Some High School _____
   - College Graduate _____
   - Some College _____
   - Other (specify) _____
   - Graduate School _____

5. Religious Affiliation:
   - Catholic _____
   - Protestant _____
   - Jewish _____
   - Other (specify) _____

6. How religious do you consider yourself?
   - Very Religious _____
   - Moderately Religious _____
   - Somewhat Religious _____
   - Not Religious _____

7. State of Retirement:
   - Fully Retired _____
   - Partially Retired _____
   - Full-Time Employed _____

8. How would you rate your present state of health?
   - Excellent _____
   - Good _____
   - Fair _____
   - Poor _____

9. Lifetime Occupation (i.e., homemaker, salesperson, executive, lawyer, etc.):
   ____________________________________________________________

10. Current income from all sources:
    - Under $15,000_____
    - Between $15–25,000 _____
    - Between $25–35,000 _____
    - Between $35–50,000 _____
    - Above $50,000 _____

11. Type of community in which you are living more than half of each year:
    - Small Town _____
    - Small City _____
    - Large City _____
    - Retirement Community _____
    - Suburban Community _____
12. If you checked retirement type community in question 11, where was the original residence in which you spent the major portion of your working life?
   Small Town_____ Small City_____ Large City_____  
   Suburban Community_____ Other (specify)_____

13. What is your age? _____years

14. What is your sex? _____Female _____Male

**Senior Adult Sexuality Scales (SASS) (Part II)**

Attitudes—Scale I

1. I think there is too much sexual freedom today.  
2. Abortion is a greater evil than bringing an unwanted child into the world.  
3. Sexual activity amongst older single senior citizens is not acceptable behavior.  
4. Premarital sexual intercourse is morally wrong.  
5. Women should not initiate sexual activity as often as men.  
6. Stronger laws should be passed to curb homosexuality.  
7. Frequent desire for oral-genital sex is an indicator of an excessive sex drive.  
8. Sexual intercourse should only occur between married partners.  
9. Masturbation is generally an unhealthy practice.  
10. Sexual activity between young adults simply for enjoyment is unacceptable behavior.  
11. Men who lose their spouses generally need sexual activity more frequently than women who lose their spouses.  
12. Women should not experience sexual intercourse with their mate prior to marriage.  
13. I think people are too sexually active today.  
14. Laws should be passed to ban pornography.  
15. Too much information about sex and contraception is available to young people today.  
16. Modern attitudes and morals about sex are responsible for the breakdown in the American family.

**Senior Adult Sexuality Scales (SASS) (Part III)**

Interest—Scale II

Part A

1. Having sex with someone I have recently met
2. Stimulating my own genitals until climax (ejaculation, orgasm)  
3. Having sex with someone other than my spouse or regular mate  
4. Having sex with more than one partner at a time (group sex)  
5. Having sex with partners considerably younger than myself  
6. Watching sex movies  
7. Reading sex books or magazines  
8. Receiving oral sex to climax (ejaculation, orgasm)  
9. Receiving oral sex until partner reaches climax  
10. Extramarital/extra committed partner sex activity

Part B

1. Kissing, cuddling, touching, petting  
2. Having my breasts stroked or kissed  
3. Body massage as sex play  
4. Having sex in the shower  
5. Extended foreplay that leads to intercourse
6. Sex only with someone of the opposite sex
7. Talking about sex with my partner

**Senior Adult Sexuality Scales (SASS) (Part IV)**

Activities—Scale III

1. **How often do you engage in sexual intercourse?**
   
   ___ times per day  ___ times per week  ___ times per month
   ___ times per year  ___ never

2. **How often do you engage in touching, cuddling, petting as foreplay to sexual intercourse?**
3. **How often do you engage in oral sex as foreplay to sexual intercourse?**
4. **How often do you reach orgasm (climax)?**
5. **How often do you use a vibrator or other objects for sexual stimulation with a partner?**
6. **How often do you initiate (start) sexual activity with your partner?**

**Senior Adult Sexuality Scales (SASS) (Part V)**

Biographical Information II

1. **How would you rate your current participation in athletic activities?**
2. **How would you rate your participation in athletic activities when you were 35–45 years old?**
3. **How would you rate your current participation in social functions?**
4. **How would you rate your participation in social functions when you were 35–45 years old?**
5. **How would you rate your current participation in sexual activities?**
6. **How would you rate your participation in sexual activities when you were 35–45 years old?**
7. **How would you rate your current interest in sexual activities, if it were available whenever you wanted it?**
8. **How would you rate your interest in sexual activity when you were 35–45 years old?**
9. **How would you rate your current sexual attitudes?**
10. **How would you rate your sexual attitudes when you were 35–45 years old?**
11. **(Circle the appropriate statement)**

   Do you consider yourself a:
   
   Heterosexual person (preference for sexual partner of opposite sex)
   Homosexual person (preference for sexual partner of same sex)
   Bisexual person (can prefer sexual partner of either sex)

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*Each item in this section is followed by 7-point Strongly Agree-Strongly Disagree scales.

*Each item in this section is followed by 7-point Very Interested-Not Interested scales.

*The remaining items in this section are followed by the same response options.

*Items 1–6 are followed by 7-point Inactive-Very Active scales.

*Items 7 and 8 are followed by 7-point Not Interested-Very Interested scales.

*Items 9 and 10 are followed by 7-point Very Conservative-Very Liberal scales.