Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures

Terri D. Fisher, Clive M. Davis, William L. Yarber, Sandra L. Davis

Brief Index of Sexual Functioning for Women

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Raymond C. Rosen, Jennifer F. Taylor, Sandra R. Leiblum
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The Brief Index of Sexual Functioning for Women (BISF-W) was developed in response to the lack of a brief, standardized self-report measure of overall sexual function in women. Previous self-report measures have been either overly restrictive or inappropriate for use in large-scale clinical trials. None of the self-report measures to date provide a comprehensive, reliable assessment of key dimensions of sexual function in women, including sexual desire, orgasm, and satisfaction. Reynolds et al. (1988) have described the Brief Sexual Function Questionnaire (BSFQ) for men, a 21-item self-report inventory of sexual interest, activity, satisfaction, and preference. The BSFQ has been found to be highly reliable, and to discriminate between depressed, sexually dysfunctional, and healthy males (Howell et al., 1987; Reynolds et al., 1988). Surprisingly, no corresponding measures to the BSFQ for self-report assessment of female sexual function were available. The present questionnaire was developed to provide a comparable, brief self-report measure of sexual function for women.

Description

The BISF-W consists of 22 items, assessing the major dimensions of sexual desire, arousal, orgasm, and satisfaction. Several items were adapted from the BSFQ, particularly those assessing frequency of sexual behavior, fantasy, masturbation, and sexual preference. Additional items were included to address specific issues believed to affect women’s sexual functioning and satisfaction, such as body image, partner satisfaction, and sexual anxiety. Several items were designed to evaluate sexual performance difficulties in women, such as diminished arousal or lubrication, pain or tightness during intercourse, and difficulties in reaching orgasm. Items assessing the impact of health problems on sexual functioning are also included. Most items are arranged in Likert-type format to rate the frequency of occurrence of sexual desire, arousal or satisfaction associated with common sexual behaviors. Based upon a principal components analysis, three major factors were identified, which were
labelled Sexual Desire, Sexual Activity, and Sexual Satisfaction.

Response Mode and Timing

Respondents are required to circle the single best answer to each question. The inventory takes approximately 10–15 minutes to complete.

Scoring

Individual items are scored and the aggregate scores for each of the three major factors are computed. Items for the Sexual Desire factor are 3, 6, 8, 14, and 20. Items for the Sexual Activity factor are 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 17, and 20. Items for the Sexual Satisfaction factor are 6, 9, 10, 15, 18, and 19. Item 16 is used independently as a measure of body image. Items 1, 2, 21, and 22 assess the presence of a sexual partner, sexual activity during the past month, and the respondent’s sexual orientation, in terms of both experience and desire. These items are individually scored.

Reliability

In a sample of 269 women, aged 20–73, test-retest reliability was assessed by means of repeated administration of the questionnaire over a 1-month interval. Reliability was determined by means of a Pearson correlation coefficient between factor scores at the baseline and 1-month retest interval. Internal consistency was evaluated by means of Cronbach alpha coefficients for each of the factor scales. The test-retest reliability of factor scores ranged from .68 to .78. The internal consistency of the instrument ranged between .39 for Factor 1 to .83 for Factor 2. The relatively low consistency for Factor 1 was attributed to the split loading of several items with other factors.

Validity

No significant correlations were observed between the BISF-W factor scores and the Marlowe-Crowne (1964) Social Desirability Scale. This indicates that responses to the BISF-W were not biased by the effects of social desirability. Concurrent validity was assessed by means of comparison of specific factor scores with the corresponding scales of the Derogatis Sexual Function Inventory (DSFI; 1975), a comprehensive, 261-item measure of sexual information, attitudes, experience, drive, body image, sex roles, and sexual satisfaction. Correlations between BISF-W factors and subscales of the DSFI were all in a positive direction, ranging from .59 to .69. Item 16, which assesses body image, was significantly correlated with the DSFI Body Image Scale \( r = .62, p < .001 \). The scale has been used for assessment of sexual functioning in a community-based sample of 329 adult women (Rosen, Taylor, Leiblum, & Bachmann, 1993).

Other Information

The DSFI may be obtained through the MAPI Institute (http://www.mapi-institute.com/).

References


Changes in Sexual Functioning Questionnaire

ANITA H. CLAYTON1 AND ELIZABETH L. MCGARVEY, University of Virginia School of Medicine

Assessment of sexual functioning is an important component in many clinical encounters, and in research settings it is increasingly of interest with regard to side effects of new medications. Adequate sexual functioning for most people is an important factor for good quality of life. There is a need for brief, easy-to-use assessment instruments that provide

1Address correspondence to Anita H. Clayton, Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Science, University of Virginia, 2955 Ivy Road, Suite 210, Charlottesville, VA 22903; e-mail: ahc8v@virginia.edu