SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN A GROUP OF URBAN FEMALES
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Sexual behaviour of 75 normal married females was studied. Most of them had a healthy attitude to sex. Frequency of sexual activity decreases with age and duration of marriage. Median frequency for 21-30 years age was 2/week, for 31-40 years was 1.4/week and for 41-50 years was 0.5/week. Frequency of coitus did not correlate with socio-economic status. Nearly 52% women had more than 50% satisfactory coitus. Sexual satisfaction was significantly associated with economic status and satisfactory marriage. It did not have any correlation with frequency of coitus in women above 30 years of age. Duration of foreplay also did not significantly relate to sexual satisfaction. Touching of breast and clitoris were most preferred foreplay activities for females while for males penile stimulation was preferred activity. 53% of males ejaculate before their wives could have orgasm yet it did not significantly affect sexual satisfaction.

Sexual behaviour in women had been a matter of speculation in our country. No scientific study exists which could provide insight into normal sexual behaviour of Indian women. Ancient Indian literature described women as great temptresses. Manu states "it is the nature of women in this world to cause the seduction of man, for which reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females". It was emphasized that the sex urge in her is so great that she will cohabit with any man irrespective of his age and appearance. "If she be chaste, it is because she has not found a proper man, place or opportunity". Kautilya also felt that "neglect of intercourse with the wife after her monthly ablution is violation of Dharma". These attitudes created the image of women as sexually unsatiable. It leads to insecurity in many which may lead to sexual problems. Sexual problems are also important in genesis of many emotional disorders so it is important to have some information regarding sexual behaviour in normal population. Present study was therefore undertaken to study the sexual behaviour of healthy married females with the following main aims:

i) To study the frequency of coitus and its relationship with psychosocial variables.

ii) To study the frequency of sexual satisfaction and its association with related variables.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

SAMPLE

Sample of this study consists of seventy five married females belonging to urban areas of Lucknow. These subjects were contacted by the second author (female social worker) who has been working in sex-clinic of the department for last 10 years and has good experience and skill in eliciting information about sex. Each informant was explained the purpose of study. They were told that no objective information was available regarding sexual experiences of women. Therefore we wanted to collect reliable data in this area so that sexual and marital problems could be effectively treated. They were also assured that the information will be kept confidential. We did not interview the husband because it was felt that if both partners are interviewed than the chances are that more subjects may give socially acceptable answers. Most of the subjects cooperated in this endeavour. During selection of subjects attempt was made

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to get subjects from different social, economic and educational strata. But in spite of our best efforts the sample consists of more subjects from upper economic strata.

Information was obtained with the help of a specially prepared semistructured sex questionnaire. This sex-questionnaire has 76 questions and it covers various facets of sexual and related behaviour. Mainly it incorporates questions about knowledge of sex and its source, relation with husband, first sexual experience, auto erotic activities, frequency of coitus, foreplay, sexual satisfaction, sex stimulating behaviour, premarital sex relations if any, fantasy, sexual thoughts, contraceptives etc. The questionnaire was first administered to 15 female subjects to evaluate its comprehension and applicability. It was found to be easily comprehensible. The questionnaire was prepared in Hindi and the interviewer was free to explain the questions to the subjects, if there was any difficulty in comprehension. Questions on extra-marital or premarital sex were asked but not emphasized because it was felt that it may block the informant. Similarly, we did not ask for details of coital positions because it was felt that it may also inhibit the informant.

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

(a) Frequency of coitus: The informants were asked to give approximate number of coitus during previous three months. In case the couples were not staying together in last three months or one of them had some problems, then the frequency of three months before separation or illness was obtained. The frequency is expressed in terms of coitus per week.

(b) Sexual satisfaction (Orgasm): The informants were explained that a sexual intercourse can be pleasant or unpleasant. In some intercourses they may experience a feeling of excitement and complete relief. They were asked to estimate the percentage of this tension release experience (orgasmic coitus) in the total number of intercourses in the preceding three months. This has been expressed in terms of percentage of total coitus.

RESULTS

The informants in this study were mostly cooperative and the investigators felt that information provided was truthful. One will have to give allowance for the process of recall which might be affected by multitude of factors.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SAMPLE

Sample consists of 75 females in age range of 18 to 50 years. Their age, education, income, occupation, duration of marriage and parity is shown in table-1. Nearly one third of the subjects were employed. Only 12% of the informants were illiterate while nearly 37% were graduate or post-graduate. Similarly more than 40% of the sample had an income of rupees 2500/- p.m. or more. Thus it shows that the subjects largely belonged to middle and upper-socio economic groups.

The duration of marriage is more equally distributed in this sample. There were nearly 13% females whose duration of marriage was less than one year while in each subsequent five year blocks there were 24%, 20%, 16%, 9% and 8% subjects respectively.

More than one third of the sample was issueless, while 22% had 1 to 2 children, 32% had 3 to 5 children and only 9% had more than 5 children.

ATTITUDE TO SEX

All informants were given four options regarding their liking of sex: not at all/little/much/very much. 72 informants chose the
'much' category. Only three informants did not like sex, two because of physical problems and the third due to marital disharmony.

Table 1: Characteristics of sample (N = 75)

|                        | N  | %   |
|------------------------|----|-----|
| **Age (in years)**     |    |     |
| Less than 20           | 3  | 4.0 |
| 21-30                  | 39 | 52.0|
| 31-40                  | 24 | 32.0|
| 41-50                  | 9  | 12.0|
| **Education**          |    |     |
| Illiterate             | 9  | 12.0|
| Up to V                | 1  | 1.3 |
| VI - X                 | 25 | 35.3|
| XI - XII               | 12 | 16.0|
| Graduate               | 15 | 20.0|
| Postgraduate           | 13 | 17.3|
| **Income (Rs. per month)** |    |     |
| Upto 1500/-            | 19 | 25.3|
| 1501-2500/-            | 22 | 29.3|
| 2501-3000/-            | 10 | 13.3|
| 3001-3500/-            | 8  | 10.7|
| More than 3500/-       | 16 | 21.3|
| **Duration of marriage (in years)** |    |     |
| Less than 1            | 10 | 13.3|
| 1-5                    | 18 | 24.0|
| 6-15                   | 27 | 36.0|
| More than 15           | 20 | 26.7|
| **Occupation**         |    |     |
| Service                | 26 | 34.7|
| Housewives             | 49 | 65.3|
| **Parity**             |    |     |
| Nil                    | 27 | 36.0|
| 1-2                    | 17 | 22.7|
| 3-5                    | 24 | 32.0|
| More than 5            | 7  | 9.3 |

**FREQUENCY OF COITUS**

First Month: Frequency of coitus was studied for the first month after consummation. During first month frequency was asked in terms of number of coitus (Table 4) per day. Frequency of one per day was reported by 20 (27%) subjects, while 39 (53%) had a frequency of 2-3 coitus a day and 16 (21%) had a frequency of four or more coitus per day. Maximum was six times a day and minimum was once in four days. Frequency in first month of marriage may indicate the libidinous strength of the individuals. This was further confirmed when the frequency of first month was compared with the frequency of preceding three months before the inquiry. Subjects having 4 or more coitus/day had a much higher frequency of coitus during the preceding three months than those having low frequency in first month.

Surprisingly none of the informants in high coitus frequency group complained against the high sexual demands of the husband.

**FREQUENCY OF COITUS IN PRECEDING THREE MONTHS**

Frequency of coitus has been studied in terms of average number of coitus per week in the last three months. Only 4 subjects had a frequency of seven or more coitus/week while 22 subjects had a frequency of less than once per week.

As frequency is largely dependent on age and duration of marriage so the relationship of frequency of coitus has been shown with age and duration of marriage in Table-3 and 4 respectively.

**FREQUENCY AND AGE**

There were only three subjects below 20 years of age and they had frequency between four to once a week. Remaining sample showed a distinct trend of reduction of frequency with
increasing age. Effect of age becomes more apparent after 40 years and all the nine subjects in this age group had a frequency of two or less/week. Sexual frequency shows a wide scatter in each age group. Hence, median frequency was calculated for each age group. Median frequency of coitus (Table 4) for different age groups are: Below 20 years 1.67/week, 20-30 years 2.0/week, 31-40 years 1.41/week and 41-50 years 0.5/week.

Table 2: Present age and frequency of coitus in last three months

| Present age (in years) | Frequency |
|------------------------|-----------|
|                        | 7 times and | 5-6 times/week | 3-4 times/week | 1-2 times/week | Less than 1 week |
| 15-20 (N = 3)          | N          | %            | %              | %             | %               |
| 21-30 (N = 39)         | 4          | 10.3        | 28.2           | 12.8          | 23.1            | 25.6            |
| 31-40 (N = 24)         | 5          | 16.7        | 16.7           | 37.5          | 29.1            |
| 41-50 (N = 9)          | 4          | 16.6        | -              | 4             | 5               |

\[ x^2 = 5.17, \text{d.f.} = 2, \text{N.S.} \]

(Pooling: 15-20 and 21-30, 31-40 and 41-50, Frequency: 3-4 times/week and above)

Table 3: Duration of marriage and frequency of coitus in last three months

| Duration of Marriage (in years) | Frequency |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
|                                 | 7 times and | 5-6 times/week | 3-4 times/week | 1-2 times/week | Less than 1 week |
| Less than 1 (N = 10)            | 4          | 3              | -              | 1              | 2               |
| 1 - 5 (N = 18)                  | 40.0       | 30.0           | -              | 10.0           | 20.0            |
| 6 - 15 (N = 17)                 | -          | 6              | 5              | 6              | 1               |
| More than 15 (N = 20)           | -          | -              | 4              | 7              | 10              |

\[ x^2 = 9.25, \text{d.f.} = 6, \text{N.S.} \]

(Pooling: 3-4 times/week and above)
Frequency and Duration of Marriage

Frequency of coitus shows a wide fluctuation in the first year of the marriage. 4 subjects who had a frequency of 7 or more/week were in the first year of marriage while 3 subjects in the first year of marriage had a frequency of less than 2 coitus per week. During the first five years, 61% had a frequency of 3-6 coitus/week while 39% had a lower frequency. After the marriage duration of 6 to 15 years, this trend seems to get reversed. In this group, only 37% had a frequency of 3 or more while 63% had lower frequency. In subjects where marriage has lasted more than 15 years, 93% had a frequency of 2 or less/week. This clearly shows that the frequency of coitus is reduced with increasing duration of marriage.

Frequency of coitus did not show any association with income, education, and occupation.

Table-4 Present frequency of coitus in relation to frequency of first month

| Frequency of 1st month (per day) | Frequency of last 3 months               |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
|                                 | 7 times and more/week | 5-6 times/week | 3-4 times/week | 1-2 times/week | Less than 1/week |
| Upto 1 (N = 20)                 | 20 N                     | -              | 1              | 3              | 7               | 9               |
|                                 | 27.0 %                   | -              | 5.0            | 15.0           | 35.0            | 45.0            |
| 2 - 3 (N = 39)                  | 39 N                     | 3              | 6              | 5              | 13              | 12              |
|                                 | 53.0 %                   | 7.7            | 15.4           | 12.8           | 33.3            | 30.8            |
| 4 & more (N = 16)               | 16 N                     | 1              | 8              | 2              | 4               | 1               |
|                                 | 21.0 %                   | 6.2            | 50.0           | 12.5           | 25.0            | 6.2             |

Table-5 Sexual satisfaction and income

| Income (Rs. Per month) | Sexual satisfaction |
|------------------------|---------------------|
|                        | 76-100% | 51-75% | 26-50% | Upto 25% | Unsatisfied |
| Upto 1500 (N = 19)     | N %      |        |        |          |             |
|                        | 5      | 2      | 3      | 4        | 5           |
|                        | 26.3   | 10.3   | 15.8   | 21.1     | 26.3        |
| 1501-2500 (N = 22)     | N %      |        |        |          |             |
|                        | 9      | 2      | 6      | 5        |             |
|                        | 40.9   | 9.1    | 27.3   | 22.7     |             |
| 2501-3500 (N = 18)     | N %      |        |        |          |             |
|                        | 8      | 5      | 4      |          | 1           |
|                        | 44.4   | 27.8   | 22.2   | -        | 5.6         |
| More than 3500 (N = 16) | N %    |        |        |          |             |
|                        | 8      | -      | 5      | 3        |             |
|                        | 50.5   |      | 31.2   | 18.8    |             |

\[ X^2 = 6.05, \text{d.f.} = 2, p < 0.05 \]

(Pooling upto 1500 and 1501-2500, 2501-3500 and above 3500).
SEXUAL SATISFACTION

Sexual satisfaction was measured in terms of percentage of coitus which were experienced as fully satisfying (orgasmic) during last three months. 39 subjects were satisfied in more than 50% of coitus while 6 did not have a single satisfactory coitus. Of these six, two had some gynecological problem, remaining four were dissatisfied due to marital disharmony. It clearly indicates that complete dissatisfaction in sex is a rare occurrence. Sexual satisfaction shows a relationship with income. High income subjects were significantly more satisfied than low income subjects (p < 0.05). It may reflect that psychological satisfaction due to economic comfort may be an important factor in marital sex (Table 5).

SEXUAL SATISFACTION AND MARITAL SATISFACTION (TABLE 6)

Marital satisfaction was measured by asking the wives, opinion about their marriage. Though it is very crude measure but in a study of this nature detailed assessment of marriage was not possible. 65 wives assessed their marriage to be satisfactory and ten unsatisfactory. The wives who experienced their marriage as unsatisfactory also perceived the sexual act as unsatisfactory (p < 0.01).

Table-6 Sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction

| Marital satisfaction | Sexual satisfaction |
|----------------------|---------------------|
|                      | 76-100% | 51-75% | 26-50% | Upto 25% | Unsatisfactory |
| Satisfied (N = 65)   | N       | %      |        |          |               |
|                      | 30      | 46.2   | 13     | 10       | 4             |
| Unsatisfied (N = 10) | N       | %      |        |          |               |
|                      | -       | 1.0    | 5      | 2        | 2             |

$X^2 = 7.27, \text{ d.f.} = 1, p < 0.01$

Table-7 Duration of foreplay and satisfaction

| Time taken in foreplay (in minutes) | Satisfaction (in %) |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
|                                     | 76-100 | 51-75 | 26-50 | Upto 25 | 0 |
| At once (N = 4)                     | 1      | 1     |       | -       | 2 |
| Upto 5 (N = 8)                      | 4      | 3     | 8     | 1       | - |
| 6-15 (N = 31)                       | 11     | 3     | 8     | 1       | - |
| 15-30 (N = 31)                      | 11     | 5     | 6     | 6       | 3 |
| 31 and above (N = 9)                | 3      | 1     | 4     | 1       | - |
SEXUAL SATISFACTION AND FREQUENCY OF COITUS

It was thought that sexual satisfaction should be associated with frequency. However, no such association was found except in younger age group (21 to 30 years) where subjects having more frequent intercourses felt more satisfied sexually.

Sexual satisfaction was not observed to have any significant association with age, education and occupation.

FOREPLAY AND SEXUAL SATISFACTION

Subjects were asked to give average duration of foreplay. The duration showed wide variation. Long duration of foreplay did not have any significant relationship with sexual satisfaction. On the contrary in 40 subjects whose foreplay duration was more than 15 minutes nearly 50% perceived their coital experience as less satisfactory.

PREFERENTIAL BODY PARTS IN FOREPLAY

The subjects were asked to name the two most preferred activities which they generally felt most stimulating during foreplay. Breast stimulation was most preferred activity in 64 subjects. Clitoral stimulation was second most preferred activity.

The wives were asked as what did their husbands expected them to do during foreplay. According to 63 wives their husbands liked penile stimulation as the most preferred activity.

WIVES PERCEPTION OF HUSBANDS' EJACULATION

All subjects were asked whether they generally attain orgasm first or their husbands ejaculate before they achieve orgasm. 18 wives felt that they have the orgasm before their husband ejaculate, while 17 felt that their orgasm and husbands' ejaculation were simultaneous. Forty women felt that their husbands ejaculated before they could reach orgasm (Table-8). This indicates that majority of men ejaculate before their wives attain orgasm.

|                                | N  | %   |
|--------------------------------|----|-----|
| Premature                      | 40 | 53.4|
| Prolonged                      | 18 | 23.9|
| Simultaneous                   | 17 | 22.7|

DISCUSSION

Study of sexual behaviour is a very difficult undertaking. The sampling procedure which should ideally be a random stratified sample is impossible to utilize as high number of refusals may make the study meaningless. While a study of volunteers may have a bias because persons having more acceptable views on sex are likely to cooperate. Present study has been done on volunteers and an attempt has been made to include subjects of different age and socioeconomic group. But even than the sample has predominantly an upper-middle socioeconomic group bias. So the data can not be generalised. Regional differences are also likely to play an important role. Present data at best can provide some clues for future studies and may help to minimise myths associated with sexual behaviour in women. We did not investigate in depth extra marital and premarital sex because we thought that such questions might inhibit the subjects.

Most of the subjects in the sample had a positive attitude towards sex which may negate a common feeling that Indian women are not
interested in sex. Even those women who said that they did not like sex felt so because of extrasneous reasons of physical ill health or marital difficulties. Thus, sex appears to be a likeable activity for most women in this study.

Frequency of sex act is affected by the desire of the husband. So what we get in frequency is the combined frequency of husband and wife. It will not reflect the true need of women. Strangely not many women complained of excessive demands of their husbands which may indicate that they had a much larger capability of enjoying sex. Kinsey et al. (1953) reported that most females tend to overestimate the frequency of coitus while the men underestimate it because the women feel that husbands demand sex more frequently. Our observation do not agree with it. In our sample we specially asked whether they were satisfied with the frequency of coitus to which almost all of them answered in affirmative. According to Kinsey the average active median frequency was 2.8/week in teens, 2.2/week by 30 years of age, 1.5/week by forty years of age and 1/week by 50 years of age. The frequency of this sample are quite similar to the American sample except in later age where frequency appear to be less (Median frequency below 20 years is 1.67/week, for 21-30 years 2.1/week, for 31-40 1.41/week and for 41-50 years 0.5/week). Kumar et al. (1984) have also observed almost identical figure in their study of normal females. The frequency of the teenagers can not be commented upon because there were only three subjects. The median frequency in 40-50 years age group is half of the American average which may be due to cultural differences. Indian couples in 40s may not have much privacy and many may avoid sexual indulgence due to religious and health factors.

The frequency of sex decreases with age and longer duration of marriage. But couples who had a high initial frequency of sexual activities tend to maintain higher frequency of sexual activities even in later ages. Frequency did not have any association with socioeconomic status of the individuals. Kinsey et al. (1953) also did not find any such correlation. The myth that people of lower socioeconomic group have higher frequency of coitus as this is the only pleasurable activity for them seems to be unjustified. Though we did not have adequate sample of the lowest economic group but the trend does not favour this myth.

Sexual satisfaction is a psychophysiological phenomenon and its adequate assessment is very difficult. All subjects were asked about the percentage of coitus where they felt fully satisfied and relaxed after the act. It has been considered as orgasmic coitus. Of all the coitus studied, 59.39% coitus were experienced as orgasmic by the subjects. Landis et al. (1940) observed frequency of sex satisfaction in 70% of their sample. Chesser (1956) studied 3705 married females in England and found 59% "usually" orgasmic. Kinsey (1953) reports that average female reaches orgasm in 70-77% of marital coitus. Sen Gupta and Lynn (1972) in a study of Indian married couples observed that 86% women found their sexual relations satisfactory to a large extent. Our figure is lower because we have calculated the percentage from the total number of coitus while Kinsey has calculated it for average female.

In the present sample, age and sexual satisfaction does not appear to be correlated. According to Kinsey age and orgasm have inverse relationship. As the age advances more and more women develop the capacity to achieve frequent orgasms. Our sample does not seem to have adequate representation of elderly females due to which it is difficult to draw any valid conclusion in this regard.

Frequency of sex act does not seem to have any association with sexual satisfaction except in 21-30 years of age where subjects having more frequent coitus seem to be more satisfied. In other age groups no such relation-
ship exist. This is an important finding because it will negate the general belief that frequent sex acts are essential for satisfying the women. Many men in their fourties do develop this type of anxiety.

Sexual satisfaction had a significant association with income level. This observation may indirectly indicates that higher income may lead to comfortable home life and a more satisfying emotional atmosphere which might be conducive to sexual satisfaction. Quality of marital relations was also related to sexual satisfaction. Wives who felt their marriage to be happy were significantly more satisfied. This emphasises the importance of psychological factors in sexual satisfaction.

Foreplay is generally emphasised as an important variable in female satisfaction by majority of marriage counsellors and marriage manuals. Present study does not reveal any significant correlation between the duration of foreplay and sexual satisfaction. On the contrary subjects who had prolonged foreplay showed a trend towards less satisfactory coitus indicating that extended foreplay is not desirable for sexual satisfaction. Kinsey et al. (1953) were also of the opinion that foreplay is not important for orgasm.

We enquired about the most preferred foreplay activity. Most female preferred breast stimulation. Vaginal or Clitoral stimulation was second in preference. Majority of women did indicate that these preference vary with mood. According to the wives most of their husbands preferred penile stimulation.

We also studied the simultaneousness of orgasm. Nearly 53% of the wives felt that their husbands ejaculated before they had orgasm while 23% had simultaneous orgasm and in 20% the wives had orgasm before men. It indicates that early ejaculation in men is common. Couples in which husbands ejaculated early were often dissatisfied than those who did not. But even in couples where early ejaculation was present many could achieve satisfactory adjustment. Most of such wives reported that their husbands took care to produce orgasm in them by prolonging coitus even after ejaculation. Thus little consideration and care on the part of early ejaculating husbands can produce satisfactory adjustment in sex life.

Concluding it can be said that the present study tends to provide some information about the sexual behaviour of Indian women but before it can be generalized a large scale study involving different regions and different strata of society will be required.

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