

# Sexual Lives of Senior Citizens in Nepal: Individuals' Wellbeing and Policy Recommendations



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## Abstract

There has been inadequate research on the taboo topic of sex, especially concerning senior citizens in Nepal. People often consider sex among seniors as shameful and question their ability to engage in such activities. In Nepal, the Senior Citizens Acts, 2063, define individuals aged 60 years or above as seniors, and society tends to view them as asexual as they age. However, research suggests that sex plays a crucial role in a person's quality of life, wellbeing, and health, which is often overlooked in South Asian cultures like Nepal. Consequently, little attention is given to the sex lives of aging individuals. This paper explores the sexual experiences of senior citizens, shedding light on their sexual and health issues, and emphasizes the importance of considering sex in promoting a healthy life for seniors. To gather primary data, an informal survey was conducted on Facebook, targeting senior citizens aged 65 years or older in Nepal, and over 100 responses were received within a month. The collected data was analyzed using narrative analysis methodology. The paper highlights the need for sexual and health policies to support senior citizens.

**Keywords:** Senior Citizens; Wellbeing; Psychological Feebleness; Mental; Emotional

## Introduction

Whether that be the description of sex or sexual activities in the Kamasutra, a sex manual or be the sight of sexual positions or postures reflecting on sexual desires of Gods and Goddesses carved on the woods by the temples or be the talk of intimate relationship of Vishwamitra and Menaka or be the existence or possibility of creation in this world—all of them display the significance, praise, and power of sex, and its quality relationship with human life [1]. However, the more significant and praiseworthy sex appears to be, the more discriminatory, superstitious, and taboo-like it is, especially when it comes to the discussion of older people's sexual lives. The way that society tends to ignore and oppress sexuality in the elderly is a similar sort of societal reaction that occurs toward individuals with disabilities [1].

It is evident that society views older adults as disabled, viewing and treating them in a similar way in terms of their sex lives [1]. As people with disabilities are deemed as people with no sexual desire, the sexual desire of older people can be considered as a butt of joke. It is because older people are connected to the idea of people with a disability as they are also deemed to be

physically incapable or feeble [2]. Thus, our society finds older people as disabled who are also considered asexual. Our society tends to connect the physical feebleness with mental, emotional, and psychological feebleness and concludes that older people are without sexual desire. Robert Mcurer and Anna Mollow's "Sex and Disability," Don Kulick and Jens Rydstrom's "Loneliness and its opposite," Tom Shakespeare's "The Sexual Politics of Disability," and Michael Gill's "Intellectual Disability and Sexual Agency" delve into the importance of sex and its role in enhancing the quality of life for individuals [2-5]. These works shed light on the parochial and biased attitudes towards sex, especially when it concerns the sexual lives of people with disabilities. This perspective can also be applied to the general perceptions of older people's sex lives, even in the context of Nepal.

In our society, older people are often lumped into the category of people with disabilities, leading to discouragement and neglect of their sexual lives. This connection is made by associating the feebleness of older individuals with the physical incapacities experienced by people with disabilities [6]. When society views senior citizens as lacking any sexual desire, it becomes challenging

to recognize the significance of sex in their lives. This raises the question of who will advocate for a better understanding of the importance of sex and its contribution to a fulfilling life for older individuals. Risal et al. [7] emphasize the need for improvements in the quality of life for the elderly in Nepal, focusing on their physical, sexual, and psychological well-being. By reflecting on and informing policies and programs that cater to these aspects, we can enhance their overall quality of life, health, and well-being.

The research aims to explore and understand the sexual experiences of senior citizens, thereby assessing the overall quality of life of the elderly population in Nepal. By delving into their sexual experiences, the study seeks to shed light on the specific health and sexual issues they encounter. This examination is crucial to highlight the challenges and concerns faced by older individuals in relation to their sexuality. The research also underscores the importance of developing sexual policies that specifically cater to the needs of senior citizens in Nepal. By recognizing and addressing the unique sexual health needs of the elderly population, these policies can contribute to improving their overall well-being and quality of life. Ultimately, the study aspires to create a comprehensive understanding of the sexual aspects of older people's lives, leading to informed policies and initiatives that promote a healthier and more fulfilling life for senior citizens in Nepal.

### Overview:

Based on the 2021 census data of Nepal, it was found that approximately 6.05 percent of the population were over the age of 65, which amounts to more than one and a half million individuals [8]. This significant portion of senior citizens underscores the importance of considering their quality of life as a crucial factor. Quality of life is not solely determined by social and cultural aspects but also encompasses sexual aspects [2-5]. The significance of sex extends beyond the lives of young adults and is equally relevant to older individuals. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual health as being physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially healthy. Repressing sexual desires can adversely impact a person's overall quality and rhythm of life.

Research published in the *Clinical Medicine Journal*, in the article titled "Factors Conditioning Sexual Behavior in Older Adults: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies" by [9], highlights the importance of healthy sexual experiences throughout a person's life, especially for those aged fifty and above. The article emphasizes that sexual activities among the older population are integral to their quality of life, affecting their mental and physical health, and contributing to satisfying relationships while helping prevent chronic diseases. Failing to fulfill sexual needs may lead to depression, pessimism, loneliness, and other emotional consequences, potentially causing individuals to behave abnormally in their sexual practices. Thus, understanding and addressing the sexual well-being of older adults is essential to ensure a fulfilling and healthy life experience for this significant

demographic.

Older individuals often experience diverse levels of sexual activity. Some may not engage in sexual relationships due to social stigma or other reasons despite their desires. This can be attributed to factors such as not being married or having lost their partners with whom they could have had sexual relationships. Additionally, societal attitudes towards sexual practices among older people and individuals with disabilities contribute to the lack of understanding of their sexual needs [1]. This creates a situation where they are unable to find a consultant or health worker to discuss their sexual health, reflecting the parochial perspective prevalent in society, particularly concerning older individuals' sexuality.

The 2021 Census of Nepal indicates that there are over three million people aged sixty and above, among whom some may be living without a partner due to never having married or experiencing the loss of a spouse. Remarriage might be more common among men due to the patriarchal norms that frown upon widows remarrying. In South Asian societies, including Nepal, discussions about sex and its significance are often considered taboo, reflecting the parochial and patriarchal nature of these communities [1]. Openly talking about sex is discouraged, and the age factor further hinders discussions related to sexual matters. Furthermore, sex is frequently confined to the context of sexual intercourse, limiting the broader understanding of sexual health.

In an article titled "Sex Life of Older People: Self-Reported Sexual Activity in Australian Sexagenarians" published in the *Clinical Research Journal*, Jason A Ferris, Anthony M A Smith, and others [10] emphasize the importance of an active sexual life for overall health. The research revealed that more than 90 percent of respondents recognized the significance of sex in relation to human health. The survey questions focused on physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction related to sexual activity. Health experts assert that regardless of a person's age, their sex life is intricately linked to their overall well-being. In the article "The Secrets of Life of Older People That Can Challenge Our Notions of Intimacy" [11], it is revealed that individuals over the age of seventy engage in sexual activity more than three times a month, while some may shy away due to their reserved nature. The article further highlights that those who maintain an active sex life tend to experience a higher quality of life compared to those who abstain. In his article "Sex in the Senior Years," [12] argues that many people mistakenly believe that as individuals age, they lose interest and importance in sexual matters. Nonetheless, a survey conducted by the University of Michigan [13] disproves this notion, revealing that forty percent of people between the ages of 70 and 80 continue to be sexually active. This demonstrates the significance of sex in older individuals' lives.

Although aging may bring some challenges, such as erectile issues for men and vaginal dryness for women, the major hindrances to active sexual activities are attributed to social

attitudes, lack of awareness, deep-rooted cultural taboos, and biased understandings of sex. In a British survey conducted by Lee, Nazroo, et al. [14], 60 percent of individuals aged 70 to 80 were found to be engaging in sexual activities, with 33 percent still active between 80 to 90 years old, though fewer were women. Interestingly, the reason for reduced sexual activity in women is not due to a lack of desire but rather limited opportunities, as revealed by the study. As Kalra et al. [15] eloquently put it, "Human beings are never too old to enjoy a happy and healthy sex life" (p.41). Such research shows that senior citizens are not asexual, but rather that healthy sexual activity among partners correlates with their quality of life.

Research challenges the stereotype that older individuals lose interest in sex and highlight the importance of acknowledging and supporting the sexual desires and relationships of seniors. According to an article titled "Sexual Activity Among Seniors: What is Normal?" published in the Huffington Post [16], a study with 7000 participants revealed that only 3 percent chose not to disclose their sexual activity, while most of the respondents reported being sexually active even in their eighties. In another article, "We Slept with Hundreds of People: Three Older Women on Sex and Pleasure," published in Repeller [17], Iman Hariri-Kia emphasizes that sex deepens and enhances the quality of a relationship between two people. It is a misconception and false to assume that older individuals have no sexual desire.

Sexual desire does exist among senior citizens despite the myth that as a person ages, they lose a desire. Cano et al. [9] support this notion by stating that sexual desire exists among older people, and they can fully engage in it. In fact, some older individuals have even better sex lives than they did as adults, especially when they are not burdened by social and familial pressures. Joanning and Keoughan [18] have written about common myths surrounding sex among older people. One of the myths, they write is:

**Myth:** Older couples no longer desire or have sex. **Reality:** Between the ages of 60 and 64, 89% of married women and 87% of married men are sexually active. For those older than 80, 29% of men and 25% of women continue to be sexually active. The lower rate of sexual activity for those older than 80 is often due to the lack of a sexual partner rather than lack of interest or ability [18]. This infers that sometimes social and cultural taboos about sex, sexual biasness, religious prejudices about sex, and the question of morality regarding sex interfere with the quality of people's sexual lives and other myths. Similarly, the article titled "Frequency of Sexual Intercourse Among Residents of Bangladesh, India, and Nepal," authored by Yasir Arafat et al. [19], highlights the significance of physical relationships in human health. However, it points out that society often fails to comprehend the importance of sexual activities for older people. In the context of Nepal, societal attitudes towards widows, particularly women, are biased and linked to cultural taboos. Widows are discouraged from remarrying, especially if they belong to a lower caste or come

from poor backgrounds, which disregards their sexual needs and desires [20].

Unfortunately, the more marginalized an individual is, the less consideration is given to their capacity for sexual expression. Whether a person in their older age does have a capacity for sex or not is the perception despite the fact that sexual activity makes one's life meaningful, healthy, and refreshing and they are still capable enough to engage in such activities. Comfort argues that age should not be seen as an obstruction to sexual activity [21]; rather, it is people's perceptions and social pressures that hinder their sexual desires. Comfort emphasizes that many couples over the age of sixty-five continue to engage in regular sexual activity, and any decrease in activity is often due to physical or relationship fragility, not inherent sexual problems. The author challenges age-based performance myths and cites cultural influences on sexual perceptions, highlighting that in France, a significantly higher proportion of older women believe sex is important compared to their British counterparts. According to Comfort, as people age, they gain patience, kindness, and an increased ability to both give and receive, making sex even more meaningful as time goes on. He concludes that some of the most spectacular and joyful sex imaginable occurs between individuals who consider themselves part of the "older generation." All these ideas collectively emphasize the importance of acknowledging and valuing sex throughout a person's entire lifespan, including in their later years.

**Data Collection Methods:** In this research, the investigator adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both primary and secondary sources and utilized the narrative method for data analysis [22,23]. A set of questions pertaining to sex, sexual activities, and sexual desire were formulated and shared on social media platforms, such as Facebook, within the geographical region of Nepal. The questions were created using Google Forms, and a link to the survey was included in the posts. There was no direct solicitation or approach to individuals for participation in the survey; rather, anyone over the age of 18 who came across the questions on social media could opt to respond at their discretion. As a result, the identities of those who participated remained anonymous, and consent was implied by the voluntary nature of the responses.

The findings of the survey were presented in the form of combined percentages, without any personal identifying information disclosed. Within a month, the survey received an impressive response of over 100 submissions, not only from senior citizens aged 65 years or older, but also from younger adults. To complement this primary data, the researcher also collected secondary data through an extensive review of existing literature, including sexual policy documents and research articles, focusing on the sexual and health experiences of senior citizens in Nepal. The adoption of this mixed-methods approach and narrative data analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the

challenges faced by senior citizens in Nepal concerning their sex lives. The research provided valuable insights for policymakers to enhance senior citizens' sexual lives, ultimately contributing to their overall quality of life and well-being.

**Narrative Method:** Narrative method is important to analyze the collected data, especially autobiographical experiences senior citizens share for this research. Autobiographies or personal narratives should inform policy [24]. Griffiths and Macleod [24] asserted, the autobiographies of people marginalized for reasons of gender, race, disability and social class has much to offer to those decision makers. Finally, autobiographies may be relevant because of the way they help its audience reframe an issue, by making the familiar strange and giving a different perspective on what was personally taken for granted. Autobiographies are more or less the subject of policy (p. 134). Utilizing narrative analysis, researchers can delve into the sexual experiences of senior citizens in Nepal by engaging with their stories, thereby gaining a profound understanding of their lived experiences. Feldman et al. [25] argued that stories play a pivotal role in shaping reality and constructing political and public policy spaces. They emphasized that narratives serve as valuable data because individuals often make sense of the world and their place in it through storytelling.

Listening to the narratives of marginalized senior citizens within specific contexts allows researchers to grasp the political and cultural nuances that shape individuals' lives in those settings. Analyzing these stories not only sheds light on what is happening but also offers insights into the people's perceptions of why and how events unfold [25]. The narrative method uncovers the implicit and alternative perspectives in these narratives, leading to the discovery of socially constructed realities. Narrative analysis assists in unearthing the underlying voices and unveiling alternative narratives, which can be instrumental in policymaking. This process involves the creation of meaning through binary oppositions [25-27]. For instance, in senior citizens' narratives, it becomes possible to derive an alternative understanding of sexuality by contrasting it with asexuality. When viewed in a postmodern context, narrative analysis serves as a tool through which meaning is constructed via the practice of binary oppositions. In this context of the significance of deconstruction, it is important to bring in here what Abel and Sementelli [28] proposed. All definitions are socially constructed, and reconstructed on a continuing basis, and variation in the meaning or the extension of a concept is a function of alternative evaluative perspectives.

To understand the historically and culturally constructed meaning of something, deconstruction is employed, not to elucidate in the sense of attempting to grasp a unifying content or a theme, but to elucidate cultural biases, oppressive power relationships, and dominating epistemologies that secure patterns of advantage and disadvantage... (p. 16). Narrative analysis proves indispensable in policymaking as it uncovers cultural biases,

oppressive power dynamics, and dominant epistemologies that may be overlooked in policy narratives. By identifying alternatives and revealing gaps in policies influenced by cultural biases, stereotypes, and oppressive relationships, narrative analysis plays a crucial role. In contexts where sex is considered taboo, narrative methodology can be employed to explore and understand these intricacies. Through narrative analysis, one can grasp the implied meaning within stories by discovering how logic is constructed and how syllogism is employed [25]. Syllogism analysis helps identify recurring logics across different stories and reveals how narratives construct archetypical characters that represent simplistic policy arguments. Narratives serve as significant policy tools as policymakers can draw conclusions based on implicit assumptions about characters within the stories [25].

By valuing personal narratives, the narrative method allows marginalized voices, such as those of senior citizens in this context, to be taken into account during policymaking. This research endeavors to explore the sexual experiences of senior citizens by immersing into their narratives. According to [29], narratives serve as tools for exploring human experiences and constructing reality. Analyzing narrative reality means giving narrative form to personal experiences. Narratives provide a sense of what has happened or what might occur. In the postmodern condition, narratives create meaning in communicative and interactive settings, as suggested by Lyotard [30]. When narratives are created, they are meant to make sense for the storytellers, to give meaning to the self [31-33]. Narratives often include stories about individual lives, struggles, and experiences, expressed in the first, second, or third person, reflecting on various situations that might occur. Narrative analysis encompasses a wide range of personal histories, including biographies, life histories, autobiographies, as well as fictional and non-fictional works such as novels and poetry. All these forms contain reflections of lived experiences and the search for one's identity [31,32,34]. As such, narratives have emerged as a central means of organizing self and identity, helping individuals define who they are or perceive themselves to be based on the stories they tell about their lives [35].

In narrative analysis, the stories themselves become the primary data to be examined. By seeking out the problems or issues embedded in these narratives, narrative inquiry allows for a deeper understanding of people's experiences and the social and cultural challenges they face. Czarniawska [22] described narrative methods as a means of delayering grand narratives in social research. This approach is valuable for qualitative researchers seeking new perspectives, as narratives often reflect the raw and naturalistic aspects of everyday life as experienced by individuals. Within the context of senior citizens' (a)sexual experiences, narratives provide a means of understanding the phenomenological aspects of their lived realities. Narratives serve a purpose that quantitative analysis may not fully address, especially when it comes to understanding the unique experiences and stereotypes surrounding the sexual lives of older individuals.

**Limitations:** The use of social media as a data collection tool has its limitations, particularly in reaching remote areas and those without access to social platforms. However, this study demonstrates several strengths in its data collection approach. Firstly, it embraces a diverse array of secondary sources, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of sexual issues among senior citizens in Nepal. The incorporation of peer-reviewed journal articles ensures reliance on high-quality research to inform the study's findings. Moreover, the inclusion of government documents and policies provides valuable insights into existing regulations related to the sex lives of senior citizens in Nepal. The study effectively utilizes informal means, such as an online survey posted on Facebook, to gather data, thereby capturing a wide range of perspectives on sex from senior citizens in Nepal.

This approach is likely to generate valuable information regarding the significance of sex among seniors and highlight the need for sexual policies and programs that cater to their unique needs. The use of narrative method to analyze the data is equally important. However, it is essential to recognize the study's limitations as weaknesses. One such weakness lies in the primary data collection methods employed. The voluntary nature of the responses and the specific targeting of individuals may lead to potential exclusions of certain segments of the population or those with limited media literacy. Additionally, the sample size for the primary data collection method (over 100 responses) may not be fully representative of all senior citizens in Nepal as the responses are received from younger adults as well. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these limitations when interpreting the study's results. Despite its strengths, the study's findings should be contextualized and viewed with awareness of the potential biases introduced by its data collection methods.

**Data Analysis:** The collected data in this study has been analyzed using the Narrative method, involving the categorization and coding of data under emerging themes, and an interpretative approach [22,36]. Narrative analysis holds significant importance in qualitative research as it uncovers implicit meanings within narrative voices and reveals alternative narratives that can be valuable in policymaking. This approach creates a situation where meaning is constructed through binary opposition, as exemplified in the differentiation between being sexual and asexual within the narratives of senior citizens. Narrative accounts of senior citizens' sexual experiences bring forth emotions and authenticity that cannot be fully understood until shared. The richness of these emotions and the depth of authenticity are achieved through acknowledging the narratives of senior citizens and understanding the truth of their lives. Such narratives serve a purpose that quantitative analysis may not fulfill, particularly in understanding the unique sexual experiences of older individuals and challenging stereotypes [37]. Below, we discuss the survey results based on the identified themes.

**Discussions:** The discussions presented here emphasize the significance of the topic of sex in the lives of senior citizens, despite the prevalent stereotypes that lead to a reluctance in openly discussing the subject. Sex becomes even more of a taboo and shrouded in shame when it pertains to senior citizens. This section also highlights the influence of patriarchal beliefs and perceptions, which further contribute to framing sex as a taboo topic, and result in senior citizens being seen as asexual or people with disabilities. The analyzed discussions and narratives delve into a nuanced understanding of sex, challenging the myth of how sexual lives of senior citizens are commonly perceived. When senior citizens share their own experiences and narratives, it provides an opportunity to deconstruct these misconceptions. This section's insights make a significant contribution to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding discussions about sex in the lives of senior citizens.

### Based on their Narratives, the Following Categories are Explored (Table 1)

#### Sexually Active

The survey results showed that the majority of respondents fell within the 40-49 age range, closely followed by the 30-39 age group. Interestingly, there were minimal responses from individuals aged 60-69, and none from those aged 70 or above. This could be attributed to the fact that the older age group constitutes a smaller portion of the population compared to younger age groups. Additionally, many individuals in this age range may not be familiar with using Facebook or completing online forms, leading to their non-participation in the survey. Among the respondents in the 40-49 age group, a significant number appeared to be sexually active and engaged with the topic. This age group might have already had sexual experiences, leading to a higher comfort level in discussing sexual matters compared to younger respondents. Their maturity may contribute to a more nuanced understanding of sex and related issues. Furthermore, their responses challenge the myth that sexually active individuals are mainly teenagers or those below 40. It shows that a person can be sexually active at any age.

Although there were few responses from the 60-69 age group, one respondent privately shared their sexual experiences through messages. This individual, who is 65 years old, mentioned being sexually active and engaging in sexual relationships at least once a week with their partner of the same age. He said, "I am 65 now, but I still am sexually active. I have sexual relationships at least once a week. My partner is my age and we both equally invest on this. It refreshes our mood and makes us feel young and healthy." They emphasized how these experiences rejuvenate their mood and make them feel young and healthy. The respondent further said, "After sex, I feel like I think clearly, like a clear sky after rain, a sort of a spiritual healing." Such responses highlight the significance of sex not only as a physical need but also its role in mental, psychological, and spiritual well-being.

These ideas align with what Ghimire's [38] writes about sex, suggesting that it should be studied not solely as a physical need but also for its connections to a person's mental, psychological, and spiritual aspects. In her book, "Karmana," under the title "Sex Philosophy," Ghimire [38] writes, "sex is connected to human need, human relationships, and the basis of the whole creation. So why should there be such a parochial and suspicious understanding of sex?" (p.39). Even the Kamasutra defines sex in a philosophical, spiritual, and artistic manner, referring to it as an art aesthetic [1]. This broader perspective of sex goes beyond mere physicality and emphasizes its profound impact on a person's overall well-being, whether that be a younger or older adult.

### Heteronormativity

Similarly, the study's findings revealed that the majority of respondents were male, and no participants identified as belonging to the "other" gender category, which encompasses individuals who identify as transgender, transvestite, gay, or bisexual. The absence of responses from the "other" category can be explained in two ways. Firstly, it is possible that even if some respondents fell into the "other" category, they may have hesitated to disclose their gender identity in a public setting, despite the research's anonymity. This reluctance could stem from concerns about potential judgment or discrimination. Alternatively, some respondents might have chosen not to identify with the "other" category to conform to the prevailing heteronormative notion that only two sexes, male and female, exist—a reflection of lingering social and patriarchal beliefs in many societies. Some participants opted for the response "I don't want to mention" regarding their sexuality, indicating their adherence to the idea of heteronormativity or social taboos that hindered them from exploring their sexuality freely.

Heteronormativity remains prevalent in South Asian culture, especially in countries like Nepal, primarily due to deeply entrenched traditional values, religious and cultural beliefs, social stigma, lack of education and awareness, family and community pressure, legal and policy barriers, media representation, and a general lack of acceptance and support for LGBTQ+ individuals [1,20]. These barriers often obstruct LGBTQ+ individuals from living fulfilling and authentic sexual lives, preventing them from experiencing a healthy and high-quality life overall. Had the concept of heteronormativity not been imposed, individuals of all genders and ages could have recognized and embraced their vibrant sexuality.

### Participation

Most respondents in the survey were originally from Nepal, which may be attributed to the researcher boosting the survey questions specifically within the context of Nepal. Nonetheless, the responses still offer insights into the perspectives of individuals in South Asia. It is evident that females remain hesitant to participate

in discussions related to sex. This may be due to the social taboo surrounding the topic of sex, let alone senior citizens, which tends to impact women more negatively. Furthermore, data from the Nepoliancat website [39] revealed that only 4 percent of Facebook users in Nepal were aged 65 or over, with male users outnumbering female users. This could be attributed to a range of factors such as women being more likely to be engaged in household chores and other duties, as well as higher levels of illiteracy and patriarchy in the country. These findings demonstrate the pervasive nature of gender disparities and cultural norms in Nepal, which continue to impact the unequal participation of women in various spheres of life, including sex. It can be understood that the level of women's participation in surveys can serve as an indicator of their ability to engage in active sexual lives. It suggests that when women's participation in surveys is low, it implies that women, including senior citizens, might face barriers that hinder their engagement in sexual activities. However, in families where women are sexually active with their partners, their sexual activity tends to remain consistent over time, potentially contributing to prolonged sexual and overall health even during the senior years [40].

### Relationship

The survey results indicated that over 90 percent of the respondents were married, with only a small number of participants being unmarried. However, some respondents chose not to disclose their marital status, which could suggest that they are unmarried, living in a relationship, or cohabiting. This finding suggests that society is becoming more open-minded about alternative relationships, but there is still a sense of discomfort and hesitancy about publicly discussing these issues. This is likely due to the stereotypes and social norms prevalent in South Asian societies, where living together outside of marriage is still considered taboo and looked down upon. Overall, these results highlight the need for continued progress towards greater acceptance and understanding of alternative relationships in South Asian societies, and the need of such relationships for healthy lives, instead of considering such relationships as taboos.

The survey question, "If you are not married, do you have a boyfriend or a girlfriend/an intimate partner?" received varied responses from the respondents. More than half of them (50%) said "no", indicating that they did not have a partner. Meanwhile, 27% said "yes" and around 9% answered "other". Those who selected "other" may have partners but did not identify them as either a boyfriend or girlfriend. The fact that some respondents indicated having partners even though they are not married highlights the importance of intimate relationships and physical needs. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of Nepal, which is a patriarchal and superstitious society that often views sex as taboo. The survey results suggest that despite social stigmas, people still have a need for intimacy and sex, which may manifest in various forms of relationships.

In societies where social beliefs deem the topic of sex as taboo, senior citizens face significant challenges in finding partners, especially if they are without one or if their spouse has passed away. This difficulty becomes even more pronounced for older women seeking companionship. The prevailing social norms restrict their ability to pursue sexual relationships or explore their sexual desires, leaving them with limited opportunities to fulfill their emotional and physical needs. Such restrictive conditions hinder senior citizens from fully utilizing their sexual lives and experiencing meaningful relationships, even if they have a genuine desire for companionship. The impact of these societal perceptions of sex extends beyond the realm of intimacy and affection. It jeopardizes the sexual health and overall well-being of senior citizens. Sexuality is an integral part of human life, regardless of age, and plays a crucial role in one's physical, emotional, and mental health. As discussed previously, depriving senior citizens of fulfilling sexual relationships can lead to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and unmet emotional needs, negatively affecting their overall quality of life.

### Premarital Sex

In this study, the researchers delved into respondents' attitudes and experiences regarding premarital sex. Surprisingly, more than 60 percent of the participants reported refraining from engaging in sexual activities before marriage. However, it is noteworthy that over 27 percent of the respondents admitted to having sex before getting married, highlighting a significant proportion of individuals who have experienced premarital intimacy. The intriguing part emerges when examining the responses of more than 5 percent of the participants who chose to respond with "maybe" or "don't want to say." This ambiguity suggests that they might have had premarital sexual experiences but were hesitant or reluctant to openly disclose them. This hesitancy can be attributed to the prevailing societal stigma and taboo surrounding premarital sex in Nepal.

The reluctance and shyness displayed by some participants in discussing their premarital sexual experiences underscore the deeply ingrained societal norms that discourage open dialogue about sex before marriage. The stigma associated with such experiences creates a culture of secrecy and shame, making it challenging for individuals to share their stories openly. This reluctance to talk about premarital sex not only perpetuates the taboo but also hinders healthy sexual exploration and expression, potentially affecting individuals' overall quality of life. It is essential to address this issue and foster an environment where open discussions about sexuality are encouraged. A healthy sexual life is interconnected with a person's mental, spiritual, and physical well-being, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) [41]. By breaking down the societal barriers and promoting sexual education and awareness, individuals can be empowered to make informed choices about their sexual health and experiences.

### Frequency of Sex

As the survey data was meticulously analyzed, intriguing patterns began to emerge regarding the frequency of sexual activity among the respondents. Surprisingly, over 60 percent of those surveyed revealed that they engaged in sexual activity more than five times per month. This finding shed light on a community where sexual intimacy was a regular and significant part of their lives. However, there was an enigmatic group of about 18 percent of respondents who chose not to disclose their sexual activity frequency. This veil of secrecy gave rise to two plausible explanations. Some individuals might abstain from sexual activity altogether due to various reasons such as personal choice, health concerns, or religious beliefs. On the other hand, there was a possibility that this group engaged in sexual activity way more frequently than the five times reported by the majority. Their reticence might have stemmed from a sense of privacy or even cultural norms that discourage discussing such intimate matters openly.

The researchers observed a unique aspect that influenced respondents' openness about their sexual activity- inherent shyness. For some, discussions about sex were so taboo that even overhearing conversations about sexual frequency made them feel uncomfortable. In such a context, it wasn't surprising that a significant number of respondents opted to withhold this information, safeguarding their privacy. Among the small proportion of respondents who did disclose their specific frequency, only 6 percent reported engaging in sexual activity four times per month. This modest percentage suggested that a select few followed a less frequent pattern in their intimate lives. Interestingly, the number of respondents who reported having sex two or three times per month was minimal. This could be attributed to various factors, including health concerns or the natural effects of aging. As age advances, some individuals might experience changes in their sexual desire or ability, leading to a decrease in sexual frequency. A captivating revelation from the survey was the correlation between the age group of 40-49 years and the maximum reported frequency of sexual activity. Within this demographic, respondents seemed to be more sexually active than other age groups, challenging the stereotype that sexual frequency declines with age. This insight suggested that sexual satisfaction and intimacy might remain vibrant and essential aspects of life even as individuals approach their forties and beyond.

### Experience of Sex

The survey findings provide intriguing insights into how individuals feel after engaging in sexual activities. Notably, almost 90 percent of respondents expressed feeling "fresh" after sex, indicating a positive and revitalizing experience. However, a small portion, around 6 percent, chose not to disclose their feelings,

potentially hinting at the sensitivity and privacy surrounding this intimate topic. Interestingly, over 5 percent of respondents reported feeling like “life has just begun” after sexual encounters, suggesting a profound sense of renewal and positivity. On the other hand, less than 3 percent mentioned feeling “tired” post-sex, but the context of this fatigue remains ambiguous as it is unclear whether it is accompanied by positive or negative emotions. The prevalent sentiment of feeling fresh and renewed among the majority of respondents underscores the significance of sex in one’s life. Beyond being a physical act, sex appears to hold emotional and psychological importance, invigorating individuals and bringing positivity to their daily lives. In an interview published in her blog, sexual educator Joslyn Nerdahl says that sex is important, highlighting that sex can contribute to increased confidence and self-assuredness. Moreover, the physical health benefits associated with sexual activity are remarkable. For instance, sex triggers the release of endorphins, commonly known as “feel-good chemicals,” in the brain, promoting a sense of happiness and well-being. Additionally, engaging in sexual activities can boost the immune system, contribute to joint lubrication, and even improve sleep quality [42]. Understanding the positive impact of sex on both physical and emotional well-being underscores its importance as a holistic aspect of human life.

### Sex Education

Unraveling the data further, the survey unearthed some intriguing trends. It revealed that while traditional marital unions remained the majority, there was a noticeable shift towards cohabitation, signifying evolving perspectives on relationships in the town. When it came to the frequency of sexual activity, the data illuminated fascinating patterns. Most respondents reported engaging in sexual intimacy more than five times a month, and interestingly, the highest frequency was observed in the age group of 40 to 49 years, challenging preconceived notions about sexual activity and age. As the researchers delved into the emotional aftermath of sex, they discovered that a majority of respondents felt “fresh” and invigorated. This insight offered glimpses into the potential positive impact of sexual intimacy on individuals’ well-being and mental health. However, the survey did not only bring to light the positive aspects; it also underscored a crucial issue. Despite the frequency of sexual activity, half of the respondents lacked adequate knowledge on the subject. This knowledge gap threatened to hinder the town’s journey towards healthy and informed sexual relationships [43].

In the face of these revelations, the survey findings emphasized the indispensable role of sex in people’s lives. It was evident that a comprehensive understanding of sex could empower individuals to make informed decisions about their sexual health, relationships, and overall well-being. The researchers recognized that providing accurate and comprehensive information about

sex was a vital step towards bridging the knowledge divide in the community. Through targeted sex education initiatives, the town could foster healthier attitudes towards sex, promoting understanding, respect, and communication in relationships [44,45].

### Concluding the Themes

#### Key Findings:

The research identifies the need for inclusive policies and initiatives that embrace sexual health and well-being for all individuals, regardless of age, gender identity, or relationship status. The followings are the key findings:

**Diverse Sexual Experiences and Attitudes:** The research highlights the diverse sexual experiences and attitudes of individuals in Nepal, emphasizing the importance of understanding and addressing this diversity. **Age-Related Knowledge and Participation Gap:** The study reveals a knowledge and participation gap among different age groups. While the 40-49 age range respondents appeared sexually active and engaged with the topic, those aged 60 and above showed limited response. This indicates the need for targeted initiatives to ensure inclusive representation and understanding of sexual experiences across all age groups, including senior citizens. **Gender Identity:** The research sheds light on the role of gender identity in shaping sexual experiences and attitudes, highlighting the need for policies and initiatives that promote inclusivity and acceptance of diverse gender identities.

#### Acceptance of Alternative Relationships:

The study addresses the importance of acceptance for alternative relationships, indicating the need to challenge societal norms and promote a more open and inclusive attitude towards different forms of relationships. **Premarital Sex Stigma:** The research emphasizes the existence of stigma around premarital sex, calling for comprehensive sex education and initiatives to dismantle such taboos and foster a more informed and accepting society. **Frequency and Experiences of Sex:** The research explores the frequency and experiences of sex among individuals, providing valuable insights into sexual health and well-being, and the need for awareness and support.

#### Recommendations for Change:

To foster a more open, informed, and accepting society, the study suggests the implementation of targeted policies and initiatives that promote inclusivity, comprehensive sex education, and the dismantling of societal taboos regarding sex. **Senior Citizens’ Sexual Health:** The research highlights the significance of addressing the sexual health and well-being of senior citizens. Social and cultural beliefs that view senior citizens as asexual and discourage their active sexual lives should be challenged to promote a healthier and more fulfilling life for older adults.

## Policy Recommendations:

Based on the data analysis above and key findings, the followings are the policy recommendations:

**Comprehensive Sex Education:** Develop and implement comprehensive sex education programs in schools and communities across Nepal. These programs should be age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and address the diverse needs and experiences of individuals, including those of different age groups, gender identities, and sexual orientations. Sex education should focus on dispelling myths and misconceptions surrounding sex, promoting healthy relationships, and providing accurate information about sexual health and well-being. Such education will help people understand the sex lives of senior citizens too.

**Inclusive Representation:** Encourage research and data collection efforts that prioritize inclusive representation of all age groups and gender identities. Policymakers should promote studies that specifically target underrepresented populations, such as senior citizens, and individuals from the “other” gender category, to gain a comprehensive understanding of their sexual experiences and needs. This inclusive approach will inform policies that cater to the diverse needs of the population. **Addressing Ageism and Gender Disparities:** Implement policies that challenge ageism and gender disparities prevalent in Nepalese society. Efforts should be made to promote gender equality and challenge patriarchal beliefs that hinder women’s participation in discussions about sex. Policymakers should work towards fostering an environment where individuals feel comfortable discussing their sexual experiences and seeking support without fear of judgment or stigma.

**Support for Senior Citizens:** Develop targeted policies and programs to support the sexual health and well-being of senior citizens in Nepal. This could include providing accessible sexual health resources for older adults, addressing barriers to accessing healthcare and information, and raising awareness about the importance of sexual health as individuals age.

**Recognition of Alternative Relationships:** Encourage policies that recognize and validate alternative relationships, such as cohabitation or relationships outside of traditional marriages. Policymakers should work towards dismantling stigmas surrounding non-conventional relationships and ensure that individuals in such partnerships have access to the same rights and benefits as those in traditional marriages.

**Awareness and Advocacy:** Launch awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts to challenge societal taboos and promote open discussions about sex. These campaigns should engage with various stakeholders, including communities, religious leaders, and media outlets, to foster a more inclusive and accepting environment that values open conversations about sex and relationships among senior citizens.

**Digital Literacy Programs:** Invest in digital literacy programs targeted towards older adults to bridge the digital divide and enable them to participate in online surveys and research. By equipping senior citizens with the necessary skills, they can actively contribute to research and discussions related to their sexual experiences and needs.

**Creating Safe Spaces:** Establish safe spaces and support groups where individuals can openly discuss their sexual experiences, seek advice, and receive appropriate guidance regarding sexual health and relationships. These safe spaces should be non-judgmental, confidential, and provide access to healthcare professionals and counselors who are well-informed about sexual health issues.

**Empowerment and Inclusivity in Research:** Encourage researchers to adopt an inclusive and empowering approach while conducting studies on sexual experiences. Researchers should strive to create an environment where respondents feel comfortable sharing their experiences and perspectives, ensuring that the data collected truly reflects the diversity of sexual experiences in the population.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this research sheds light on a frequently overlooked topic: sex among senior citizens in Nepal. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing sex as a crucial aspect of promoting a healthy and fulfilling life for this demographic. The findings expose how societal taboos and stigmas continue to impact the sexual experiences and participation of individuals, especially women and those with diverse gender identities. Contrary to the prevailing myth, the research demonstrates that senior citizens can indeed remain sexually active, feeling great, healthy, and refreshed after engaging in sexual activities. However, there’s a noticeable lack of representation from older age groups and those belonging to non-binary gender categories, highlighting the necessity for more inclusive research and policies that address the diverse needs of the population. By advocating comprehensive sex education, challenging ageism, and gender disparities, recognizing alternative relationships, and empowering marginalized groups, policymakers can create a more open and inclusive society that values healthy sexual relationships and overall well-being. Implementing these recommendations will help break the barriers surrounding sex in Nepal and lead to greater understanding, acceptance, and support for individuals of all ages and identities in their pursuit of sexual health and happiness.

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