

Sexuality after 55 years: study on representations and sexual practices in Portugal

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Rationale/Background: In Portugal the revolutionary period of 25th April 1974 symbolizes a turning point between a repressive past and a new era of liberty. There is a distinct aspect to all areas of Portuguese society after this date, particularly in the field of sexuality. The topic was absent from research lines for decades and only entered the public debate primarily from 1984 onwards, initially focussing on the clinical perspective and on stereotypes, before evolving to include other approaches.

Research Questions: In this context, it is necessary to understand what alterations occurred in the sexual representations and practices of individuals of 55 years and over, with reference to the period immediately before the 25th of April 1974 and the present day.

Methods: Using "snow-ball" sampling, semi-structured interviews were carried out with a group of 22 Portuguese individuals belonging to the aforementioned age bracket, i.e. individuals who were adolescents or young adults at the time of the 1974 democratic revolution and who currently reside in the North and Greater Lisbon regions. After carrying out the interviews, the information content was analysed, using the Maxqda program, and we tried to establish patterns among respondents' answers, seeking to outline a general framework favorable to the objectives of the work.

Results: The results show different representations of sexuality and sexual practices when interviewees refer to the pre- and post- revolutionary period. However, it can be concluded from their dialogues that despite the topic of sexuality having entered the arena of public debate, they consider society's current attitude towards the sexual activity of adults over 55 years of age to be very repressive and almost condemnatory. For this reason they continue to inhibit the expression of their sexual activity, despite understanding it to be perfectly natural.

Conclusions: These results suggest that in Portugal there is a long way to go in terms of the acceptance of sexual activity among the over 55's, it being necessary to raise social and administrative (State) awareness of the need for an in-depth discussion of the topic and the implementation of socio-educational policies which will facilitate a natural acceptance of this activity for all individuals, regardless of the age group to which they belong.

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