

La prise en charge de la santé sexuelle des femmes âgées non-institutionnalisées en Suisse Romande : État des lieux et perspectives

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Master thesis in Master of Medicine

Most studies on human sexuality focus on the 17 to 65 age group, as if beyond this limit, the issue becomes non-existent. The aim of this Master's thesis is to contribute to fill this gap by looking at the sexual health of non-institutionalized women aged 70 to 85 in French-speaking Switzerland.

This study used a qualitative methodology and was carried out in three stages. First, a literature review was carried out. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of professionals in contact with the target population. Finally, the information available in the mainstream media and the prevention resources available to older women were explored.

There is very little medical literature on sexuality of older women in Switzerland. Yet international literature shows that, at any age, sexual satisfaction is associated with physical health and subjective well-being. However, it is clear from the literature and from the practice of the interviewed professionals that this subject is rarely discussed with patients. The main barriers are socio-cultural biases, embarrassment, fear of a negative reaction and uncertainty about whom to ask about the subject. The issues faced by professionals are similar. The lack of time during medical consultations, the reduced perception of the risk of older women contracting sexually transmitted diseases and the lack of education on the subject also contribute to the problem.

In order to provide optimum care for older women's sexual health, existing barriers such as societal taboos, the lack of medical data and the limitations of current care need to be overcome. Professionals ought to question their own biases and combat ageist discrimination in order to be able to respond to patients' concerns and find the right way of approaching the subject. The representation of sexuality in old age is also very important in enabling women to fulfil their potential. As far as French-speaking Switzerland is concerned, events such as speed-dating and round-table discussions have proved their worth in bringing people together and promoting sexual fulfilment. They should be continued, expanded and supported by measures for health and social care professionals, for example by support guidelines.

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