

Does the cobbler always wear the worst shoes?

Sexuality of urologists in training

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: Sexuality is an integral part of well-being. Urologists are a population faced with a significant workload and stress that can affect their sexuality. The purpose of this study was to investigate sexuality in this population and assess factors that may impact it.

METHODS: A cross-sectional study was conducted between May and July 2023 among French urology residents and fellows. Data was collected through an anonymous questionnaire sent by the French Association of Trainee Urologists (AFUF) via email.

RESULTS: Out of 445 members of the AFUF, 196 trainee urologists responded. Among them, 130 (66%) respondents were satisfied with their sexual life, and 123 (63%) reported having one or more sexual encounters per week. In univariate analysis, factors significantly impacting the level of sexual satisfaction were gender ($p=0.029$), level of job satisfaction/well-being ($p<0.01$), level of professional burnout ($p<0.001$), and the existence of a romantic relationship.

CONCLUSIONS: Young urologists are mostly satisfied with their sexual life. Gender, level of job satisfaction/well-being, and level of professional burnout are significant factors impacting the level of sexual satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sexual health is an integral part of overall health, well-being, and quality of life.¹ In their daily practice, urologists naturally manage sexual issues in men, but also in women in the context of urinary incontinence or pelvic floor disorders, which often have an impact on sexuality.²

Furthermore, urology is a medical-surgical specialty that demands strong commitment from practitioners. Indeed, the workload, and exposure to stress can lead to professional burnout, which could have a negative impact on sexuality. Urologists in training are particularly affected by this significant workload and professional burnout. A survey conducted by the French Association of Urologists in Training (AFUF) in 2011 revealed that a quarter of urology interns and assistants experienced severe burnout syndrome.³ This rate rose to 40% in a study conducted jointly by the AFUF and the French Association of Urology (AFU) in 2020 during the COVID health crisis.⁴

Our objective was to study the sexuality of French trainee urologists and identify factors impacting it.

METHODS

Population

Between May and July 2023, a digital and anonymous self-questionnaire was sent by the AFUF to all its members (see Appendix available at cuaj.ca). The AFUF is composed of urologists in training from France and Belgium. The population of

trainee urologists includes residents (first four years of residency), junior doctors (fifth and sixth years of residency), and assistants/clinical fellows (corresponding to two years post-residency). All trainee urologists were eligible to participate in the study.

The questionnaire link was emailed to the 445 members. Several reminder emails were sent, and the survey was closed after three months.

Database

The questionnaire consisted of 24 questions. Demographic questions included: gender, professional status, age, sexual orientation, duration of current romantic relationship, and number of children. There were also questions to assess participants' overall health status; their consumption of tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, and psychotropic drugs; their job satisfaction/well-being; their level of work-related stress/anxiety; their level of professional burnout, and the number of working hours. Finally, the level of sexual desire, quality of erections, quality of orgasms, frequency of masturbation, frequency of sexual intercourse, level of satisfaction with sexual life, impact of workload on libido, impact of being a urologist on sexuality, and impact of being a urologist on discussing sexuality were evaluated.

The questionnaire was validated by the entire board of directors of the AFUF and was based on a 2014 study by the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique (IFOP) on the sexual practices of French individuals.⁴

Statistical analysis

Descriptive variables were reported as numbers and percentages for qualitative variables and as median and interquartile range for continuous variables. Univariate analyses were conducted to identify factors impacting sexuality. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$. All tests were two-tailed. Analyses were performed using R version 3.6.2. (RStudio, Inc.)

RESULTS

Characteristics of the population

A total of 196 trainee urologists responded, accounting for 44% of the AFUF members. The respondent population consisted of 119 (61%) men and 77 (39%) women; 97.5% of them were under 35 years old. This sample was composed of 89 residents, 56 junior doctors, and 51 clinical fellows/assistants. A romantic relationship was reported by 79% of participants, and 14% had children. Up to 99.5% of the responding trainee urologists worked >48 hours per week, with 21% of them working >80 hours per week (Table 1).

The work-related characteristics of the population are presented in Table 2: 77% of respondents considered themselves to have a good level of job satisfaction/well-being, 60% of them reported having a high or very high level of work-related stress/anxiety, 44.5% exhibited signs of high or very high professional exhaustion, and 76% maintained a good level of sexual desire.

Sexual satisfaction

A total of 130 (66%) respondents reported being satisfied with their sexual life (Figure 1); 123 (63%) subjects reported having sexual intercourse once or more per week (Figure 2).

The factors significantly impacting the level of sexual satisfaction are presented in Table 3. The significant variables were gender ($p=0.029$), level of job satisfaction/well-being ($p < 0.01$), level of professional exhaustion/burnout ($p < 0.001$), and the existence of a romantic relationship ($p < 0.001$). The number of weekly working hours did not significantly impact the level of sexual satisfaction ($p=0.49$).

Table 1. Characteristics of the population

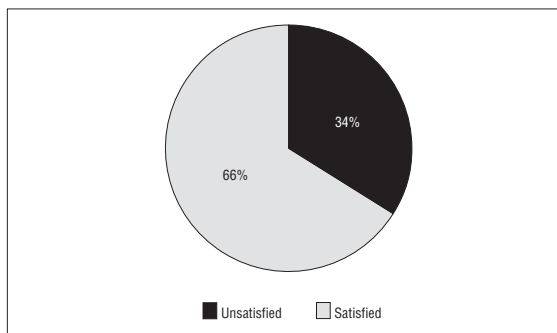
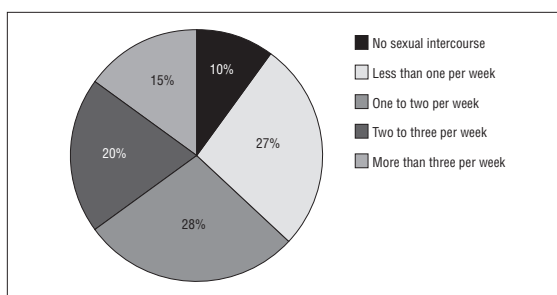
	Number of subjects (n=196)	Percentage
Gender		
Male	119	61%
Female	77	39%
Status		
Resident	89	45%
Junior doctor	56	29%
Clinical fellow -assistant	51	26%
Age		
<25 years	7	3.5%
25-35 years	184	94%
35-45 years	5	2.5%
Relationship		
No relation	40	21%
<1 year	28	14%
1-5 years	67	34%
5-10 years	41	21%
>10 years	20	10%
Parenting		
No	169	86%
Yes	27	14%

Table 2. Work-related characteristics of the respondent trainee urologist population (N=196)

	Number of subjects
Satisfaction level/well-being at work	
Very high	22 (11%)
High	130 (66%)
Low	44 (23%)
Very low or non-existent	0 (0%)
Level of stress/anxiety at work	
Very high	14 (7%)
High	104 (53%)
Low	66 (34%)
Very low or non-existent	12 (6%)
Hours worked weekly	
≤48 h	1 (0.5%)
48–60 h	22 (11.5%)
60–70 h	67 (34%)
70–80 h	65 (33%)
≥80 h	41 (21%)
Level of professional exhaustion	
Very high	11 (5.5%)
High	77 (39%)
Low	97 (50%)
Very low or non-existent	11 (5.5%)
Level of sexual desire	
Very high	47 (24%)
High	101 (51.5%)
Low	43 (22%)
Very low or non-existent	5 (2.5%)

DISCUSSION

Our study focused on the sexuality of urologists in training in France and Belgium. With over 40% of AFUF members responding to the questionnaire, the sample can be considered representative of the young urologist population. Our results show that most trainee urologists are satisfied with their sexual life (66%). Comparing our results to those of the general population under 35 years old, as reported in a 2014 IFOP survey on the sexual practices of French individuals,⁵ our population seems to have a slightly higher number of sexual intercourse than the general population (63% of respondents report having one or more sexual intercourses per week compared to 55% in the general population under

**Figure 1.** Level of sexual satisfaction.**Figure 2.** Frequency of sexual intercourse in the past 4 weeks.

35); however, sexual satisfaction is lower among trainee urologists compared to the general population under 35 (66% vs. 74%, respectively). Nevertheless, it remains challenging to compare these populations across different time periods, as several studies have reported recent changes in sexual activity within developed countries.⁶

An IFOP study for LÉLO[®] conducted via an online, self-administered questionnaire from December 2023 to January 2024 among a sample of 1911 individuals — representative of the French population aged 18 and older — reveals a significant decline in sexual activity over the past 15 years. Several hypotheses were proposed, including digital sexual competition, reduced importance of sexuality within relationships, and decreased "conjugal duty."⁷ It would be interesting to compare our results with those of the ongoing third national study, "Health, Affective, and Sexual Life," conducted by Inserm and Santé Publique France. It follows the first two editions of the survey conducted in 1992 and 2006.^{8,9}

In our study population, male gender, level of job satisfaction/well-being, and the existence of a romantic relationship are factors positively impacting the level of sexual satisfaction. The consistency of sexual satisfaction with job satisfaction or well-being confirms satisfactory sexuality as an integral part of overall well-being. This satisfactory sexuality could then partly originate from, or reflect, this overall well-being.

The finding of higher sexual satisfaction among respondents in relationships may also illustrate its inte-

Table 3. Univariate analyses of factors impacting the level of sexual satisfaction

	Satisfied (n = 130) (%)	Non-satisfied (n = 66) (%)	p
Gender			0.029
Male	86 (72.3%)	33 (27.7%)	
Female	44 (57.1%)	33 (42.9%)	
Satisfaction level/well-being at work			<0.01
Very high	20 (91.9%)	2 (9.1%)	
High	87 (66.9%)	43 (33.1%)	
Low	23 (52.3%)	21 (47.7%)	
Very low or non-existent	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	
Level of professional exhaustion			<0.01
Very high	4 (36.4%)	7 (63.6%)	
High	41 (53.2%)	36 (46.8%)	
Low	77 (79.4%)	20 (20.6%)	
Very low	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	
Hours worked weekly			0.49
≥80 h	27 (65.9%)	14 (34.1%)	
70–80 h	45 (69.2%)	20 (30.8%)	
60–70 h	46 (68.7%)	21 (31.3%)	
48–60 h	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	
≤48 h	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	
Sentimental relationship			<0.001
No relationship	13 (32.5%)	27 (67.5%)	
≤1 year	24 (85.7%)	4 (14.3%)	
1–5 years	52 (77.6%)	15 (22.4%)	
5–10 years	30 (73.2%)	11 (26.8%)	
≥10 years	11 (55%)	9 (45%)	

gration into an overall balance. This sexual satisfaction is highest in the first year of the relationship (85.7%), gradually decreasing with its duration; however, it remains higher in couples of over 10 years (45%) compared to single respondents (32.5%).

Conversely, the level of professional exhaustion is a factor negatively impacting the level of sexual satisfaction, confirming our initial hypothesis. It is interesting to note that we found no impact of the number of weekly working hours on the level of sexual satisfaction. This suggests that the potential correlation between sexual satisfaction and feelings of professional exhaustion may not be directly tied to a significant workload.

The rate of professional exhaustion was comparable in our population (44.5%) and even higher than that reported in the study jointly conducted by AFUF and AFU in 2020 during the COVID health crisis (40%).⁴ Our study took place at the end of the three-year COVID-19 pandemic, and it does not seem to have resulted in a reduction in the sense of professional exhaustion among trainee urologists.

Limitations

One limitation of our study was the difficulty in obtaining reliable data on such a sensitive subject. To address this, it was clearly stated that the questionnaire was anonymous for participants. Similarly, data in medical literature are rather scarce for comparing our results, as we found no study focusing on the sexuality of a specific socio-professional group. Moreover, sexuality being a variable that changes over time and under the influence of various factors, it is challenging to integrate our results solely within a professional context without considering societal or personal constraints; however, our study is the first focusing on sexuality within a medical specialty in France and Belgium.

CONCLUSIONS

French urologists in training are primarily satisfied with their sexuality; however, our results indicate a correlation between job dissatisfaction, a high feeling of professional exhaustion, and sexual dissatisfaction. This confirms the significance of sexuality in overall well-being and health in general. Larger-scale studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the profession's impact on sexuality.

COMPETING INTERESTS. The authors do not report any competing personal or financial interests related to this work.

This paper has been peer reviewed.

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