

Declines in Sexual Frequency among American Adults, 1989–2014

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Abstract

American adults had sex about nine fewer times per year in the early 2010s compared to the late 1990s in data from the nationally representative General Social Survey, *N* = 26,620, 1989–2014. This was partially due to the higher percentage of unpartnered individuals, who have sex less frequently on average. Sexual frequency declined among the partnered (married or living together) but stayed steady among the unpartnered, reducing the marital/partnered advantage for sexual frequency. Declines in sexual frequency were similar across gender, race, region, educational level, and working status and were largest among those in their 50s, those with school-age children, and those who did not watch pornography. In analyses separating the effects of age, time period, and cohort, the decline was primarily due to birth cohort (year of birth, also known as generation). With age and time period controlled, those born in the 1990s (Silent generation) had sex the most often, whereas those born in the 1990s (Millennials and Gen) had sex the least often. The decline was not linked to longer working hours or increased pornography use. Age had a strong effect on sexual frequency: Americans in their 20s had sex an average of about 80 times per year, compared to about 20 times per year for those in their 60s. The results suggest that Americans are having sex less frequently due to two primary factors: An increasing number of individuals without a steady or marital partner and a decline in sexual frequency among those with partners.

Keywords

Sexual frequency · Sexual activity · Marriage · Birth cohort · Generations · Time period

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