

Correlates of Satisfaction with Sexual Initiation Among Mexican Adolescents

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CONTEXT: Having one's first sexual intercourse be a positive and satisfying experience may be critical to healthy sexual development. Few studies, however, have examined adolescents' sexual satisfaction and the factors associated with enhancing or diminishing it, especially in Mexico.

METHODS: Data from 4,504 heterosexual, sexually experienced 15–20-year-olds living in three Mexican states (Morelos, Jalisco and Puebla) were taken from the 2014 Survey on Dating, Empowerment, and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Adolescent High School Students. Multinomial logistic regression was used to examine factors associated with satisfaction and dissatisfaction with one's first experience of sexual intercourse, separately by gender.

RESULTS: Most adolescents reported feeling generally satisfied with their first sexual intercourse (51% very satisfied and 40% satisfied); the proportion feeling very satisfied was significantly higher among young men than among young women (58% vs. 42%). Among both young men and women, feeling very satisfied (rather than satisfied) with first sex was positively associated with greater approval of adolescent sex (relative risk ratios, 1.06 each), as well as with higher self-esteem (1.04 and 1.03, respectively). Other variables positively associated with feeling very satisfied included having had first sex with a boyfriend or girlfriend, having had first sex less than three months prior to the survey, high socioeconomic status (for males only) and older age (for females only).

CONCLUSIONS: Self-esteem and having a positive view of adolescent sexuality may play an important role in the experience of satisfying first sex among Mexican adolescents. These should be pivotal elements of educational programs aimed at helping adolescents develop a positive sexuality and feel entitled to and in control of their sexual lives.

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Sexual satisfaction is a human right, and is seen as a key component of a healthy and positive sexuality.^{1,2} It is also critical to the development of a lifelong healthy sexuality, the foundations of which are rooted in adolescence.^{3–5} The benefits of developing a healthy and satisfying sexuality include not only the prevention of STIs and unwanted pregnancies during adolescence, but also the enjoyment of gratifying physical and emotional experiences throughout people's lives.^{1,6–9}

Despite the importance of sexual satisfaction, very few studies have examined it among adolescents and the factors that help enhance or diminish it. At least in part, this gap may be attributable to the fact that most research into adolescent sexuality comes from a perspective of concern for the associated risks and potentially undesirable consequences of sex, including adolescent pregnancy and STIs. Such a perspective inhibits the development of a comprehensive and positive approach to sexuality, and implicitly perpetuates a moralizing vision of adolescent sexuality.¹⁰

Even less research exists on sexual satisfaction at first intercourse, probably because it is clear that sex is a learning process and the first experience often may not be ideal. Even so, first intercourse is a powerful experience

connected to young peoples' sexual development.^{9,11} One study examining adolescents' sexual well-being in Mexico—the setting for this study—found that their satisfaction with first intercourse was positively associated with subsequent satisfaction with their sexual life, substantially increasing their likelihood of being highly satisfied with their sexual life.¹² Thus, exploring and understanding adolescents' satisfaction with their first sexual experiences could provide valuable information for promoting and protecting the ability of young people to have a full and satisfying sexual life.

This study examines factors associated with satisfaction in general—not just physical satisfaction—with first sexual intercourse in Mexico. In addition, it focuses on the role that approval of adolescent sexuality may play in sexual satisfaction. Such approval is assumed to be rooted in prevailing social norms and expectations regarding which sexual behaviors are (or are not) appropriate for young men and women.^{13,14} Youths' approval of adolescent sexuality may affect their attitudes and behaviors and may foster feelings of satisfaction regarding their first sexual experience.⁴ Further, identifying factors that favor a positive first sexual experience may be a powerful resource for

programs and public policies that focus on adolescents' sexual well-being. For example, when programs incorporate and promote specific elements that have previously been associated with the possibility of greater sexual satisfaction for adolescents—such as self-esteem, agency and romantic relationships—they could help prevent problems beyond the sexual well-being of adolescents, such as depression or criminal behavior. They might also promote good interpersonal relationships, a sense of competence and social integration, all of which would impact young people's general well-being and satisfaction with life.

The research described here had two specific objectives: to examine Mexican adolescents' level of sexual satisfaction with their first experience of heterosexual intercourse, and to examine the individual and partner characteristics associated with adolescents' satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with their first sexual experience. The study was limited to heterosexual intercourse because the questionnaire used did not cover expressions of sexual interaction other than vaginal sex. This prevented the incorporation into this analysis of sexual and affective practices employed by sexual minorities. A small number of the adolescents surveyed (4%) acknowledged having had sex with same-sex partners, but such information was not linked to their first sex.

Adolescent Sexual Initiation in Mexico

Mexico's cultural context is highly heterogeneous, with traditional and modern values and beliefs coexisting. The country is characterized by important gender differences regarding sexual practices: Women's virginity retains a powerful symbolic content (weaker among younger generations, but still strong), and sexual desire is only clearly legitimate when it refers to men.^{15–17} Young people also frequently experience some feelings of transgression regarding sexual initiation, with mixed positive and negative feelings. Two recent studies have corroborated that young men report more positive consequences of sexual initiation (e.g., feeling physically satisfied, feeling their reputation enhanced or feeling intimate with their partner), while young women report more negative consequences (e.g., worrying that their parents might find out, fearing that they had harmed their reputation or worrying about pregnancy).^{15,18}

The mean age at sexual initiation in Mexico in 2007 was 15 for males and 16 for females,¹⁹ which is later than in other Latin American countries.²⁰ The proportion of adults who initiated sex before age 20 has increased slightly in younger generations: According to data from the National Survey on Health and Nutrition 2012, the proportion among young men increased from nearly 73% among those born between 1971 and 1980 to 76% among those born between 1981 and 1990; among young women, the proportion increased from 58% to 66%. The proportions who initiated sex before age 16 did not change significantly, however.²¹ Contraceptive use has been increasing among adolescents, but 45% of 15–19-year-olds report not using a contraceptive method at first sex.²²

Correlates of Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual satisfaction has been defined as the subjective perception of physical, emotional and relational aspects of one's sexual life, including the various dimensions associated with sexual relationships.²³ A multidimensional construct, it includes physical, physiological and emotional factors.²⁴ Research with adults and adolescents has agreed on the appropriateness of comprehensively exploring sexual satisfaction through interpretative frameworks and ecological models. Such studies regard sexual satisfaction as a multidimensional process, where factors related to the individual, the relationship or partner, and the context converge.^{2,25,26}

In countries as diverse as the United States, Spain and Mexico, sexual satisfaction among young people has been shown to be rather high.^{4,27,28} A study of U.S. 14–30-year-olds found that 85% reported feeling satisfied with their sexual relationships.³ According to a study of Spanish university students, 82% of males and 86% of females felt satisfied with the quality of their sexual experiences.²⁹ In Mexico, an analysis of 2003 National Survey on Reproductive Health (ENSAR) data on adult males found high levels of sexual satisfaction among the three cohorts studied, with greater satisfaction among younger cohorts.³⁰ In addition, a study of medical students aged 18–27 in Mexico City found that 79% reported that their sexual life was excellent or good.²⁸ Some studies of adolescents in the United States, Canada and the Netherlands have found greater general sexual satisfaction among women than men³¹ or have shown no difference by gender,^{3,23} while other research has identified higher sexual satisfaction among men.^{1,11}

Concerning correlates of sexual satisfaction, most research has looked at overall sexual satisfaction rather than at satisfaction with first sex. However, in Finland, research among adults revealed that greater physical satisfaction was associated with a younger age at sexual initiation.³² In addition, several studies of U.S. adolescents have found that general sexual satisfaction was greater among those who initiated sex at a later age.^{3,11,33,34}

The literature documents the importance to sexual satisfaction of one's relationship with an intimate partner and one's self-esteem. Satisfaction appears to be greater when people engage in sexual relations with a steady partner (e.g., a boyfriend/girlfriend) with whom they have emotional ties and whom they trust; although this association holds true for both genders, it is more evident among women.^{3,11,27,34,35} Also, research among U.S. and Spanish undergraduate students has found that sexual satisfaction increases with rising self-esteem;^{3,36–38} among Spanish students, the association was stronger among females than males.³⁸ A study of female university students in Spain found that sexual satisfaction was lower among those with low self-esteem.³⁹ Similar associations have been seen among married men and women in the United States and Canada.^{40–42}

Some studies have shown that sexual satisfaction is higher among adolescents who were using contraceptives, possibly because of reduced fears of pregnancy or STIs.^{3,43} Contraceptive use may also increase anxiety,³⁴ however, presumably because adolescents practicing contraception are more concerned with the possible negative outcomes of sex or might feel insecure about using methods correctly. In addition, victims of childhood sexual abuse have been shown to have reduced sexual satisfaction, as well as elevated sexual dysfunction.^{44–47} The consequences of child sexual abuse may extend for many years and not only reduce sexual satisfaction, but also increase the likelihood of risky sexual behaviors, and affect physiological and psychological aspects of sexual well-being.⁴⁸ Furthermore, studies among adults in Spain and Chile have suggested a strong association between social class and sexual satisfaction, with satisfaction rising with increased socioeconomic status;^{49,50} however, such a relationship was not validated in research among Norwegian young adults.⁵¹

Correlates of Sexual Satisfaction with First Sex

As mentioned above, research on sexual satisfaction with first intercourse is limited. Several U.S. studies have found differences in levels of satisfaction at first sex between female and male adolescents, with young women often reporting feeling less satisfied.^{7,11,52} In Mexico, a study exploring the perceived positive and negative consequences of first sexual intercourse among public middle and high school students in Puebla found that the majority of adolescents reported feeling physically satisfied (67% of males and 60% of females).¹⁵ Similarly, in an analysis of associations between psychosocial correlates and perceived consequences of first sexual intercourse among a sample of high school students in Jalapa, a greater proportion of males than females reported feeling physical satisfaction at first sex (93% vs. 77%).¹⁸ Moreover, studies in the United States have found a higher level of sexual satisfaction when adolescents engage in their first sexual intercourse by choice rather than because of peer pressure or external pressure.^{3,53,54} Similarly, Mexican adolescents who felt pressure to have sex reported fewer positive consequences, including physical satisfaction.¹⁸

Approval of Adolescent Sexuality

Research has examined the roles played by parental approval or peer approval of sex and adolescent sexual behavior, but adolescents' approval of sex has been less well explored and requires more attention.⁵⁵ Adolescents' own approval or disapproval of sexual activity may be a deterrent to or a catalyst for sexual initiation. Aside from influencing age at first sexual intercourse, such attitudes may also affect the likelihood of feeling satisfaction during and after the sexual experience.^{56,57} In a context like Mexico, where a conservative and moralistic view of sexuality prevails,^{18,58,59} this aspect may be highly relevant.

Thus, in addition to the correlations of adolescent sexual satisfaction already described above, this study introduces

an additional element: adolescents' approval or disapproval of adolescent sex—that is, how valid it is for adolescents to engage in sexual relations. The hypothesis is that satisfaction with first sexual intercourse is less common among youths who espouse traditional attitudes toward adolescent sexuality. Given that social norms impose different burdens on sexuality for men and for women, one would also anticipate that young women will be more disapproving of adolescent sexuality than will young men.

METHODS

Data

For this analysis, data on high school students aged 15–20 in three states in Mexico (Jalisco, Morelos and Puebla) were taken from the 2014 Survey on Dating, Empowerment, and Sexual and Reproductive Health in Adolescent High School Students in Mexico (*Encuesta sobre Noviazgo, Empoderamiento y Salud Sexual y Reproductiva de Adolescentes Estudiantes de Preparatoria* [ENESSAEP 2014]).* Morelos was chosen because the research center that is home to the research team is located in that state. The other two states were selected based on a prior study that used nine indicators of women's sexual and reproductive health (e.g., contraception prevalence and adolescent fertility) to classify Mexican states in terms of favorability. According to that study, Morelos was classified as a state with a favorable situation in terms of women's sexual and reproductive health, while Jalisco and Puebla were considered to have an unfavorable and very unfavorable situation, respectively.⁶⁰

Schools in each state were selected randomly; the probability of selection was calculated on the basis of the number of high schools in each municipality in a state. As an incentive to participate, school authorities were offered two different talks that could be given to their students (on dating violence and on adolescent reproductive health); however, only three schools expressed interest in these talks. About 8% of selected schools declined to participate and were replaced with other randomly selected schools in the same municipality. The final sample consisted of 188 high schools—57% public and 43% private.

Mexican high schools cover three grades (or years), and the survey sample of adolescents included at least 70 students randomly selected from all three grades in each selected school (to the extent that the school size allowed).† School officials authorized the survey and informed all students that their participation would be voluntary and strictly confidential; participants did not receive compensation. Fewer than 1% of students refused to complete the survey.

*The questionnaire (in Spanish) and the database for this survey are available via open access at <http://bdsocial.inmujeres.gob.mx/index.php/enessaep>.

†Some schools had fewer than 70 students; in such cases, the survey was administered to all students in that school (with no random selection of the groups to be included).

Surveys were conducted progressively from March 2014 to September 2014 in Morelos, from May 2014 to December 2014 in Jalisco and from August 2014 to January 2015 in Puebla. They took place in schools during class time, were self-administered and generally took about one hour. During data entry, 271 questionnaires were discarded because of missing information on key variables, resulting in a sample of 13,427 adolescents, of whom 53% were female; 39% of students were from Morelos, 34% from Jalisco and 27% from Puebla. For this analysis, the sample was limited to the 4,504 respondents (2,457 men and 2,047 women) who reported ever having had heterosexual intercourse; few (179) respondents reported ever having had same-sex intercourse.

Measures

• **Dependent variable.** Adolescents' satisfaction with their first sexual intercourse was measured by a single question: "How satisfying was your first sexual intercourse?" The four response options were "very satisfying," "satisfying," "unsatisfying" and "very unsatisfying"; however, few respondents chose "unsatisfying" or "very unsatisfying," so those categories were combined to create a three-category variable.

The advantages and disadvantages of using a single item to explore sexual satisfaction have been discussed in the literature, and most authors agree on the benefits of using several items to examine both physical and emotional sexual satisfaction.^{1,61,62} However, a study that compared three scales developed to measure sexual satisfaction with a single-item measure concluded that the single-item measure performed moderately well.⁶³

• **Independent variables.** A point of particular interest here was to explore the association between approval of adolescent sex and adolescents' satisfaction with first intercourse. Thus, an adolescent sex approval index was constructed on the basis of adolescents' agreement with three statements: "people my age should wait to be older before having sex," "it's alright for girls (women) my age to have sex" and "it's alright for guys (men) my age to have sex." Students evaluated each statement on a four-point scale ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree." Answers were summed to create an index ranging from 0 to 12, with higher values indicating greater acceptance of adolescent sex; Cronbach's alpha for the index was 0.85.

The analysis also included other individual-, partner- and social context-level variables, selected on the basis of both previous research findings about correlates of sexual satisfaction—such as self-esteem, socioeconomic status, type of relationship with sexual partner, reasons for first sex and contraceptive use—and the availability of those indicators in the survey. Age at first sex was a continuous variable based on the question "How old were you when you had your first sexual intercourse with penetration, in other words, coitus?" Use of contraceptives at sexual initiation was a dichotomous variable based on the question "During your first sexual intercourse, did you or your

partner use any method to avoid a pregnancy" (yes or no)? In addition, two dichotomous variables were used to determine whether teenagers initiated sex by their own choice and whether they initiated sex because of fear or pressure from their partner or peers. In addition, adolescents were asked "Why did you have your first sexual intercourse?" and were able to choose multiple responses from eight possible answers. Three responses ("out of curiosity," "because I wanted to" and "I was following my own desire") were considered to indicate that first sex was the result of the respondents' own will, whereas five ("my partner talked me into it," "my partner asked for it as a proof of my love," "because of pressure from my peers or relatives," "because I was forced to" and "because I was afraid of losing my partner if I didn't") were considered expressions of fear or pressure. Considering that reasons for having (or not having) sex can be multiple and diverse, these two apparently opposing reasons may intervene simultaneously. The correlation between the two indicators was $r=-0.47$, indicating that while contradictory reasons often coexist, the larger the number of reasons there are pertaining to one type (i.e., positive ones), the fewer reasons of the other type (i.e., negative ones) will be present.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was used to measure self-acceptance and basic feelings of self-worth.⁶⁴ Participants evaluated 10 items (e.g., "I think I'm worth as much as anyone else," "I wish I felt more self-respect," "I don't like my physical appearance") on a four-point scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Answers were summed to create an index ranging from 0 to 40, with higher values indicating greater self-esteem; Cronbach's alpha was 0.78.

In addition, an indicator of sexual abuse prior to first sex was based on the questions "Has anyone ever tried to force you to have sex?" and "How old were you when they tried to force you or forced you to have sex the first time?" Respondents who answered yes to the first question and who gave an age at the time of abuse younger than their age at first sex were considered to have experienced abuse prior to first sex. An indicator of the type of relationship that respondents had with their first intimate partner was developed using the question "With whom did you first have sexual relations?" The response options ("with my current boyfriend/girlfriend," "with my ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend," "with an acquaintance, free [person in a free relationship] or friend," "with a relative," "with a stranger," "with a prostitute" and "other") were condensed into three categories: boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-boyfriend/ex-girlfriend; friend or acquaintance; and other.

Furthermore, a categorical variable to account for time elapsed since first sexual intercourse was included. Respondents were asked "How long since you had your first sexual intercourse?"; response options were "less than three months," "from three months to one year" and "more than one year." The hypothesis was that the longer the time since sexual initiation, the more likely the respondent would be to express a certain degree of dissatisfaction (if

any) with it. With time, the respondent would be less likely to still be involved with their first sexual partner, which might facilitate a more critical evaluation of satisfaction with first sex.²⁷ To the author's knowledge, there has been no previous test of this measure or its potential association with sexual satisfaction.

Finally, two family- or household-level variables were included. Household socioeconomic status was a composite variable constructed from the integration of two estimated subindexes: one for the presence of household assets (e.g., stove, washing machine, car, computer) and one for the educational level of the head of the household. The average of these two subindexes provided the values for a four-level socioeconomic status variable (very low, low, medium and high) determined by the quartiles of the continuous indicator. A dichotomous measure of whether the respondent lived with both parents at the time of the survey was also included. An indicator of the state of residence (Morelos, Jalisco or Puebla) was tested but was dropped because it was not associated with sexual satisfaction in bivariate analyses.

Analysis

A descriptive analysis explored the frequency distribution or mean of the main variables, using t tests and chi-squares to determine the significance of differences by gender ($p < .05$). Correlations between the independent variables and sexual satisfaction were examined (data not shown). For the analysis of the factors associated with sexual satisfaction, multinomial logistic regression models were estimated—separately by gender—to examine adolescents' likelihood of reporting their first experience of intercourse as very satisfying or as unsatisfying, with the intermediate category of satisfying set as the reference category. Listwise deletion was used; therefore, those cases with missing data in at least one variable were excluded from the regressions. All independent variables associated with sexual satisfaction in the bivariate models ($p < .05$) were included in the regression models. All analyses were conducted using Stata 14.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Nearly all adolescents reported that their first experience of sexual intercourse was satisfying (51% very satisfying and 40% satisfying); a greater proportion of males than of females considered their first intercourse very satisfying (58% vs. 42%; Table 1). Fourteen percent of young women and only 4% of young men reported their first intercourse as unsatisfying or very unsatisfying.

Most of the included variables showed significant differences by gender. In general, young women first had sex at a somewhat later age than young men (mean age, 15.7 vs. 14.9). Although approval of sexual activity among adolescents was at a moderate level among both young women and young men, it was somewhat higher among males (index score, 7.0 vs. 6.0). Similarly, both female and male

TABLE 1. Selected characteristics of sexually experienced heterosexual high school students aged 15–20 in Jalisco, Morelos and Puebla, Mexico, by gender—ENESSAEP 2014

Characteristic	Males (n=2,457)	Females (n=2,047)
MEANS		
Age at first sex***	14.9	15.7
Adolescent sex approval index score (range, 0–12)***	7.0	6.0
Self-esteem index score (range, 0–40)***	33.3	32.0
PERCENTAGES		
Satisfaction at first sex***		
Very satisfying	58.1	42.5
Satisfying	37.7	43.8
Unsatisfying/very unsatisfying	4.2	13.7
Partner at first sex***		
Boyfriend/girlfriend†	65.3	92.3
Friend/acquaintance	30.5	7.0
Other	4.1	0.7
Time since first sex (in mos.)***		
<3	56.8	68.9
3–12	30.9	23.5
>12	12.3	7.6
First sex the result of own will		
No	9.9	9.9
Yes	90.1	90.2
First sex the result of other's pressure		
No	85.1	85.1
Yes	14.9	14.9
Contraceptive use at first sex**		
No	32.2	28.3
Yes	67.8	71.7
History of sexual abuse***		
No	97.3	91.2
Yes	2.7	8.8
Lives with both parents***		
No	35.8	42.4
Yes	64.2	57.6
Socioeconomic status***		
Very low	29.4	20.6
Low	26.4	25.9
Medium	25.8	30.3
High	18.5	23.2
Total	100.0	100.0

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. †Includes a former boyfriend/girlfriend. Notes: Percentages may not add to 100.0 because of rounding. Significance for means (continuous variables) was determined using t-tests; significance for percentages (categorical variables) was determined using chi-square tests. ENESSAEP=Encuesta sobre Noviazgo, Empoderamiento y Salud Sexual y Reproductiva de Adolescentes Estudiantes de Preparatoria.

adolescents reported fairly high self-esteem, but it was slightly higher among males (33.3 vs. 32.0).

In addition, greater proportions of young women than of young men reported that they first had sex with someone they were in a formal relationship with (92% vs. 65%), that they had first sex within the three months prior to the survey (69% vs. 57%), that they used a contraceptive at first sex (72% vs. 68%) and that they had a history of sexual abuse (9% vs. 3%). Greater proportions of young men

than of young women reported living with both parents (64% vs. 58%) and being of very low socioeconomic status (29% vs. 21%). Most respondents (85–90%) reported having had first sex of their own choice and not because of fear of or pressure by others; no gender difference was found for this measure.

Correlates of Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

• *Young men.* In the multinomial models for male adolescents, several variables were associated with feeling very satisfied rather than just satisfied with one’s first experience of sexual intercourse (Table 2). Approval of adolescent sex and self-esteem were both positively associated with having had a very satisfying experience (relative risk ratios, 1.06 and 1.04, respectively). In addition, feeling very satisfied was associated with having had first sex with a girlfriend or ex-girlfriend rather than a friend or acquaintance (1.4), having had first sex less than three months before the survey rather than 3–12 months before (1.8) and having had first sex as a result of pressure from others (1.4). Young men who were living with both parents and those in the highest socioeconomic category also had an elevated likelihood of considering their first sexual experience as very satisfying (1.2 and 1.4, respectively).

On the other hand, several variables were linked with young men’s feeling that their first experience of intercourse was unsatisfying or very unsatisfying rather than satisfying. Older age at first sex was positively associated with reporting one’s first intercourse as unsatisfying: For each additional year of age, men’s risk of the outcome

increased by 16% (relative risk ratio, 1.2). In addition, having had first intercourse more than a year before the survey and prior sexual abuse were also associated with an elevated likelihood of unsatisfying first intercourse (2.1 and 3.0, respectively). In contrast, having had first sex with a girlfriend or ex-girlfriend, or as the result of one’s own free will, were both negatively associated with having unsatisfying first intercourse (0.5 and 0.4).

• *Young women.* Similar to the findings among the young men, approval of adolescent sex and self-esteem were positively associated with female adolescents’ likelihood of having very satisfying first sex: For each unit increase in approval or in self-esteem, the probability of a very satisfying experience at first sex increased by 6% (relative risk ratio, 1.06) and by 3% (1.03), respectively (Table 2, Model 2). In addition, the likelihood of a very satisfying first sexual experience increased by 8% with each additional year of age at sexual initiation (1.08), by more than 80% when the first experience happened with a boyfriend or ex-boyfriend (1.8) and by 50% if the first experience occurred within the last three months (1.5).

In contrast, female teenagers who had first intercourse under pressure from someone else were nearly three times as likely to report having had an unsatisfying or very unsatisfying experience (2.9), and young women who reported having experienced prior sexual abuse were more than twice as likely (2.2). Two factors appeared to reduce the relative risk of an unsatisfying first sexual experience: when the first sex occurred with a boyfriend or an ex-boyfriend and when it resulted from the young woman’s own choice (0.4 each).

TABLE 2. Relative risk ratios from multinomial regression models examining adolescents’ level of satisfaction with their first experience of sexual intercourse, by selected characteristics, according to gender

Characteristic	Males (n=2,344)		Females (n=1,956)	
	Very satisfying vs. satisfying	Unsatisfying/very unsatisfying vs. satisfying	Very satisfying vs. satisfying	Unsatisfying/very unsatisfying vs. satisfying
Age at first sex	0.96 (0.90–1.01)	1.16 (1.01–1.34)*	1.08 (1.01–1.17)*	0.91 (0.81–1.01)*
Adolescent sex approval index	1.06 (1.01–1.10)**	0.91 (0.83–1.00)	1.06 (1.01–1.11)*	1.05 (0.98–1.12)
Self-esteem index	1.04 (1.02–1.06)***	0.97 (0.93–1.01)	1.03 (1.01–1.05)**	1.00 (0.98–1.03)
Partner at first sex				
Boyfriend/girlfriend†	1.37 (1.13–1.66)**	0.50 (0.32–0.80)**	1.83 (1.18–2.86)**	0.40 (0.25–0.63)***
Friend/acquaintance (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Other	0.68 (0.43–1.08)	1.19 (0.52–2.74)	1.61 (0.25–10.49)	0.83 (0.16–4.20)
Time since first sex (in mos.)				
<3	1.75 (1.44–2.12)***	1.40 (0.85–2.29)	1.52 (1.20–1.92)***	1.03 (0.73–1.46)
3–12 (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
>12	1.14 (0.85–1.53)	2.08 (1.10–3.93)*	1.01 (0.65–1.57)	1.19 (0.67–2.14)
First sex the result of own will	0.88 (0.60–1.27)	0.38 (0.18–0.80)*	0.96 (0.62–1.49)	0.36 (0.23–0.59)***
First sex the result of other’s pressure	1.42 (1.06–1.91)*	1.22 (0.60–2.47)	0.93 (0.66–1.30)	2.89 (1.95–4.28)***
Contraceptive use at first sex	1.02 (0.84–1.23)	0.73 (0.47–1.149)	1.01 (0.81–1.26)	0.99 (0.71–1.36)
History of sexual abuse	1.02 (0.59–1.77)	2.97 (1.23–7.17)*	0.77 (0.52–1.14)	2.19 (1.43–3.35)***
Lives with both parents	1.21 (1.01–1.45)*	1.21 (0.77–1.90)	0.90 (0.74–1.10)	0.86 (0.64–1.15)
Socioeconomic status				
Very low (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Low	1.16 (0.92–1.47)	0.72 (0.40–1.32)	0.84 (0.63–1.11)	0.91 (0.59–1.40)
Medium	1.11 (0.87–1.40)	0.92 (0.53–1.60)	1.07 (0.81–1.42)	1.08 (0.70–1.66)
High	1.40 (1.07–1.82)*	0.86 (0.45–1.64)	0.91 (0.68–1.22)	1.08 (0.69–1.68)
<i>Log-likelihood</i>		–1832.93		–1816.14
<i>Pseudo R²</i>		0.0422		0.0684

*p<.05. **p<.01. ***p<.001. †Includes a former boyfriend/girlfriend.

DISCUSSION

The main innovation of this study is the assessment of approval of adolescent sex as a factor related to satisfaction with first sex among Mexican adolescents: For both young men and young women in the sample, higher approval of adolescent sexuality was associated with feeling that their first experience of sexual intercourse was very satisfying. It is not surprising that approval of adolescent sexuality was at a moderate level among both males and females, but was lower among the latter; this is consistent with previous findings in other countries of more sexually permissive beliefs among males.^{65,66} These results point to weaker acceptance of their right to exercise their sexuality among Mexican adolescent women than among their male peers. Clearly, this disparity requires attention and calls for implementation of programs that promote a vision of adolescent sexuality from a rights perspective; such an approach might help young women develop positive attitudes toward the healthy and responsible expression of their sexuality. On the other hand, the validation of adolescent sex is influenced at least in part by contextual social norms and the attitudes of people close to adolescents (e.g., parents and friends), which they consciously or unconsciously adopt or reinterpret.⁶⁷⁻⁶⁹ Therefore, encouraging approval and validation of adolescent sexuality may not be successful in isolation from what adults recognize and believe.

Self-esteem also stands out as being an important factor for both young men and women in terms of their satisfaction with first intercourse, although the association was somewhat more significant among the young men. These results corroborate previous research in other settings documenting positive associations between (sexual) self-esteem and sexual satisfaction,^{3,38,39,45} but they are novel for Mexico and point to self-esteem as a pivotal element for satisfying sexuality among Mexican adolescents.

The finding that a greater proportion of adolescent males than of adolescent females report feeling very satisfied with their first sexual intercourse is consistent with previous research in Mexico and elsewhere.^{11,15,28,32,70} Such results have been attributed to a double standard that operates in various dimensions of life and is particularly evident in sexuality,^{17,71,72} encouraging and celebrating men's acquisition of sexual experience while censoring and stigmatizing women who engage in sexual activity outside of marriage.^{71,73} Linked to this double standard is the finding that older age is positively associated with feeling very satisfied and negatively associated with feeling unsatisfied with first intercourse among young women, while the same characteristic is positively associated with young men's feeling unsatisfied with their first experience. This likely reflects opposing social norms and differential pressures regarding sexual initiation among women and men.^{1,16,59,73}

A noteworthy point is that young men reported higher satisfaction with first sexual intercourse than young women, even though the former were more likely to be

of low socioeconomic status, to have had first sex with a person other than a girlfriend or ex-girlfriend, and to have had first intercourse more than one year before—all factors that would be thought to lead to less satisfying first sexual experiences. It is possible that beyond individual characteristics, the ability to feel sexual satisfaction is highly defined by gender.

In general, adolescents who had their first sexual intercourse by choice were less likely to report it as being unsatisfying. In addition, those whose first experience was the result of pressure from others were more likely to regard it as unsatisfying, although this association was true only for young women. A plausible explanation of this gender difference lies in the meanings and feelings that may be associated with the experience, which in the end may be perceived as more valuable by young men and more troubling or objectionable by young women. An unexpected finding was that among men, being pressured to have sex was associated with elevated likelihood of considering the experience very satisfying; this may be explained in part by young men's need to prove their "virility" to their peers and to other men. Also, given that prevailing gender roles promote sexual initiation and sexual experience for males,¹⁶ young men may be more likely to overreport satisfaction with their first sexual experience, to meet their own expectations as well as those of their peers and society.

The results here also illustrate the negative association of prior sexual abuse with satisfaction with first sexual intercourse. For both male and female adolescents, such an experience is associated with a sizably elevated risk of having an unsatisfying first sexual experience. While such results are consistent with those found elsewhere,^{49,50} they constitute new empirical evidence for Mexico, suggesting the need for further research on the impact of childhood sexual violence on various dimensions of sexuality and general well-being among adolescents and adults.

Finally, the regression results found that for both young women and men, the likelihood of considering one's first sexual intercourse as very satisfying was positively associated with initiating sex within a relationship. In addition, when the time elapsed since first sexual intercourse was very short (less than three months), the first sexual experience was more likely to be regarded as very satisfying. A possible explanation for this finding is that the likelihood of an adolescent's relationship with his or her first intimate partner deteriorating or ending increases over time, which may color views of the experience.²⁷

Limitations

The work presented here has some important limitations. First, sexual initiation was limited to first intercourse, because the survey did not provide data on other sexual activities, such as kissing, caressing the partner's genitals or engaging in oral sex—which are often foreplay for intercourse. Future surveys and research should provide a broader perspective on first sexual encounters.

Additionally, the use of the first vaginal sex as an indicator of sexual initiation restricted the scope of the work to heterosexual first sex. Therefore, the findings presented here do not account for the experiences of sexual minority youth.

Moreover, the indicator used for satisfaction with first sexual intercourse was based on a single question that did not distinguish between emotional and physical satisfaction, and thus it was not possible to differentiate between these two dimensions of sexual satisfaction. Because sexual satisfaction is difficult to measure, future research may benefit from using scales as indicators and to distinguish between emotional and physical satisfaction in sexual encounters.

Furthermore, the fact that the sample included only adolescents currently enrolled in high school left out the experiences of those more vulnerable Mexican youth who dropped out of school and who may have initiated sex earlier and with fewer resources. This emphasizes the need for future research on adolescent sexual activity that addresses this particular population.

Additionally, the two multinomial regression models that were estimated showed very low pseudo R^2 values, indicating that while some of the independent variables included were highly significant, much of the variance remained unexplained. This implies the need to explore and incorporate into such analyses new aspects and dimensions that can help to further explain adolescents' sexual satisfaction. Finally, the survey data used for this study were not nationally representative, but representative only of youths in the three Mexican states studied (Morelos, Jalisco and Puebla).

Conclusions

To date, very few studies have addressed sexual satisfaction among Mexican adolescents, despite its well-known relevance for the development of a healthy and satisfying adult sexuality.^{3,5,74} This study expands our knowledge on the relationship between individual and contextual characteristics and satisfaction with first sex. Further research on sexual satisfaction among adolescents is needed, however, particularly in countries like Mexico, where understanding and knowledge of the subject is very limited. In line with Morgan,⁷⁵ future research efforts should focus more on the positive aspects of young people's sexual behavior and the benefits that could derive from it.

Identifying factors significantly associated with positive outcomes of sexual behavior, such as sexual satisfaction, could prove very useful in the design of educational programs on sexuality. Self-esteem may play an important role in young people's satisfaction with their first sexual experience. Similarly, the more adolescents approve of teenage sexuality—an obviously complex issue closely linked to prevailing norms in their immediate social context—the better is their chance of having a highly satisfying first sexual experience. These findings carry important implications for future research and for public policy, such as developing specific strategies for expanding knowledge on

youth sexual rights and focusing more efforts on increasing the self-esteem of children and adolescents—two pivotal axes for making it possible for adolescents to develop a positive sexuality, and a feeling of being entitled to and in control of their sexual lives.

An analysis of data on sexual minority youth could have shown different results from those reported here. Overall sexual satisfaction might have been higher, as same-sex sexual experiences have been shown to be highly satisfying.^{23,76} However, regarding the associations between characteristics and sexual satisfaction, findings for sexual minority adolescents are lacking and demand research attention. Future research on adolescent sexual satisfaction will benefit from the inclusion of groups with diverse sexual orientations. Also, directly studying the sexual behavior of adolescents who have not yet had sexual *intercourse* could provide valuable information on sexual satisfaction that have been largely ignored.¹¹

Despite the limitations acknowledged above, the results reported here show elements that may support a satisfying sexual life among adolescents. The promotion of a positive vision of sexuality—one that incorporates fundamentals of human rights, self-care, self-esteem and the validity of emotional and erotic expressions—could facilitate the appropriation and exercise of sexual and reproductive rights by adolescents. Particularly, more attention should be devoted to programs and initiatives focused on securing the social recognition and validation of adolescent sexual activity, and on promoting self-esteem among children and youths. This would likely facilitate satisfying sexual experiences among adolescents, thus improving their chances of a healthy sexual life in the present and the future.

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RESUMEN

Contexto: El hecho de que la primera relación sexual sea una experiencia positiva y satisfactoria podría ser fundamental para un desarrollo sexual saludable. Sin embargo, pocos estudios han examinado la satisfacción sexual de los adolescentes y

los factores asociados con su aumento o disminución, especialmente en México.

Métodos: Se tomaron datos de 4,504 jóvenes de 15 a 20 años de edad, heterosexuales, experimentados sexualmente y que vivían en tres estados de México (Morelos, Jalisco y Puebla) de la Encuesta de 2014 sobre Noviazgo, Empoderamiento y Salud Sexual y Reproductiva en Adolescentes Estudiantes de Preparatoria. Se usó regresión logística multinomial para examinar los factores asociados con la satisfacción e insatisfacción con la primera experiencia personal de relación sexual, separados por género.

Resultados: La mayoría de los adolescentes reportaron haberse sentido satisfechos en general con su primera relación sexual (51% muy satisfechos y 40% satisfechos); la proporción que se sintió muy satisfecha fue significativamente más alta en hombres jóvenes que en mujeres jóvenes (58% vs. 42%). Tanto para los hombres como para las mujeres jóvenes, el sentirse muy satisfechos (en vez de solo satisfechos) con la primera relación sexual se asoció positivamente con una mayor aprobación de las relaciones sexuales de los adolescentes (cocientes de riesgo relativo, 1.06 cada uno), así como con una mayor autoestima (1.04 y 1.03, respectivamente). Otras variables asociadas positivamente con sentirse muy satisfechas incluyeron haber tenido la primera relación sexual con un novio o novia, haber tenido la primera relación sexual a menos de tres meses antes de la encuesta, una condición socioeconómica alta (solo para los hombres) y una mayor edad (solo para las mujeres).

Conclusiones: La autoestima y tener una opinión positiva de la sexualidad de los adolescentes podrían desempeñar un importante rol en la experiencia de una primera relación sexual satisfactoria en los adolescentes mexicanos. Estos deben ser elementos esenciales de programas educativos dirigidos a ayudar a que los adolescentes desarrollen una sexualidad positiva y se sientan con derecho a disfrutar y controlar sus vidas sexuales.

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte: Le vécu positif et satisfaisant du premier rapport sexuel peut être essentiel à un développement sexuel sain. Peu d'études ont cependant examiné la satisfaction sexuelle des

adolescents et les facteurs associés à son augmentation ou à son amoindrissement, en particulier au Mexique.

Méthodes: Les données relatives à 4 504 jeunes hétérosexuels de 15 à 20 ans sexuellement expérimentés dans trois états du Mexique (Morelos, Jalisco et Puebla) ont été extraites de l'Enquête de 2014 sur les rencontres, l'autonomisation et la santé sexuelle et reproductive des lycéens. Les facteurs associés à la satisfaction ou à l'insatisfaction à l'égard du premier rapport sexuel ont été examinés, de manière séparée suivant le sexe, par régression logistique multinomiale.

Résultats: La plupart des adolescents ont déclaré se sentir généralement satisfaits de leur premier rapport sexuel (51% très satisfaits et 40% satisfaits). La proportion de ceux très satisfaits était nettement supérieure parmi les jeunes hommes (58% contre 42% chez les jeunes femmes). Dans les deux sexes, le fait de se sentir très satisfait (plutôt que satisfait) était associé positivement à l'approbation supérieure de l'activité sexuelle à l'adolescence (rapports de cotes relatifs, 1,06 chacun), ainsi qu'à une plus grande estime de soi (1,04 et 1,03, respectivement). Les autres variables associées positivement au sentiment de haute satisfaction étaient le fait d'avoir eu son premier rapport avec un petit ami ou une petite amie, de l'avoir vécu moins de trois mois avant l'enquête, le rang socioéconomique élevé (pour les jeunes hommes seulement) et l'âge plus avancé (pour les jeunes femmes seulement).

Conclusions: L'estime personnelle et la perception positive de la sexualité à l'adolescence peuvent jouer un rôle important dans le vécu de premiers rapports sexuels satisfaisants parmi les jeunes au Mexique. Ces facteurs doivent compter au nombre des éléments essentiels des programmes éducatifs qui cherchent à aider les adolescents à développer une sexualité positive dont ils puissent revendiquer le droit et la maîtrise.

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