

# CHALLENGES OF AGEING AND SEXUAL HEALTH

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## Background

Ageing related health is a new arising challenge, high on the global list of public health priorities. Demographic projections say the global population aged 60+ years will double by 2050 (the proportion of 65+ in Croatia will be 26.8%), showing this population as fast growing. People often stay sexually active at an elderly age.

Globally and in Europe, burden of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) is increasing in the older population. However, sexual health among the elderly is sometimes overlooked. Limited information on challenges related to sexual health in the elderly, could make public health not effective in planning and implementing appropriate measures. Sexual health is an

important aspect of health, and longer life expectancy brings new challenges for sexually active individuals and for health and public health professionals as well.

## Material & Methods

Internet search for information on sexual health and sexuality in older people was performed. Key words included: Older people and sexual health, Older people and sexuality, Public health interventions /actions. Search incorporated papers and reports on ageing; scientific researches and professional publications in Croatian language; and data obtained by official governmental, county and public health websites, in the period of last 5 years.

## Results

- There was a small number of documents about sexuality in older adults, except for popular articles with advice about sexual health in an old age.
- Articles written by physicians are rare, most of it debate on how sexuality in elderly is a taboo.
- Psychiatrists and psychologists are very engaged about this topic (these articles represent a valuable source of information)
- No official documents (neither clinical or public health), research or strategy aimed specific to sexual health of older people.
- Topic of ageing and sexuality were found at the last and forthcoming Croatian Congress on gerontology and geriatrics, and two books that have been published recently.

## Conclusion

Despite implemented preventive programs targeting elderly in Croatia, none of them is dealing with their sexuality. Sexuality is part of healthy ageing and increased number of HIV infection and other STDs in older adults, may pose new problems in future. The stigma of sexuality in an older age makes older adults unwilling to share

their sexual issues. Both, the stigma and the lack of knowledge in health professionals, can contribute to delays in appropriate health services for this vulnerable group. One of the solutions is to strengthen adequate, target education of healthcare professionals and include sexual health in geriatric care.