

## **Psychological and psychophysiological factors in sexual desire and behaviour**

### **ABSTRACT:**

#### **Background**

Women's coital frequency was related to a sense of flow of human life transcending one's lifetime and to feelings of connectedness with deceased persons (henceforth, connectedness).

#### **Aim**

The present research aimed replicating and extending these findings by examining the associations of connectedness with sexual desire, frequency of sexual behaviours, basal testosterone (T), T elicited by sexual stimuli, and concordance between T and subjective desire (a putative marker of sensitivity to the sexual effects of T). The mediating role of various psychological and psychophysiological variables was explored.

#### **Method**

251 Portuguese (149 women) provided saliva samples for T determination before and after sexual stimuli by luminescence immunoassays. Interoception was measured by a heartbeat detection task.

#### **Results**

Female connectedness correlated with 1) sexual desire, 2) T response to romantic visual stimuli, and 3) concordance between basal T and past month desire; these findings were partly explained by indices of emotional awareness (interoception and low alexithymia) and feelings of unity with the All and of immersion in sensory and imaginary experiences. Male connectedness correlated with concordance between desire elicited by explicit visual sexual stimuli and both basal T and post-stimulus T (no mediating variables were found).

#### **Conclusions**

The findings confirm that connectedness is linked to greater sexual responsiveness. In the case of women, this was mainly due to emotional awareness and tendency to experience feelings of unity with the All and immersion in sensations and imagination (characteristics often related to mystical-type experiences).

#### **Keywords**

Sexual desire, Sexual behaviours, Testosterone, Spiritual transcendence, Emotional awareness

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