

SEXUAL PLEASURE as a CRUCIAL PART of WELLBEING

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BACKGROUND

- Sexual health narrowly defined to include:
 - Sexually transmitted diseases (STIs)
 - HIV/AIDS
 - Unintended pregnancy
 - Sexual dysfunction
 - Sexual coercion and sexual violence

- Dismissal of study of pleasure and other positive elements of sexual health and sexuality

ASSERTING a NEW MODEL

“Sex positive” or “Positive Sexuality” approach:

- *Sexuality and sexual activity as **natural** and **healthy** part of life*
- ***Knowledge** and **respect** for one’s own and others sexual and reproductive **rights***
- *Open, honest **communication** between sexual partners*
- *Practice of **safe**, mutually **consensual**, **pleasurable** sex*

*EFFECTIVE MODEL TO IMPROVE SEXUAL
HEALTH OUTCOMES*

PLEASURE AS A CORE COMPONENT OF SEXUAL HEALTH

“Sexual health is a state of **physical, emotional, mental** and **social well-being** in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Sexual health requires a **positive** and **respectful** approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having **pleasurable** and **safe** sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. “

- *World Health Organization (WHO)*

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES of POSITIVE SEXUALITY

Increased **SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITY**

- Sexual body-esteem and self-esteem
- Sexual self-efficacy
- Entitlement to sexual pleasure
- Reflection on sexual activity

- *Intimacy, healthy relationships and sense of connection*

DEFINITIONS of CONSTRUCTS

- **SEXUAL SELF-ESTEEM:** confidence and comfort with one's own sexuality; ability to request or refuse sexual activities; facility with sexual communication
- **SEXUAL SELF-EFFICACY:** to determine one's engagement in sexual activity; fulfillment of sexual goals while respecting oneself and sexual partners
- **SEXUAL SATISFACTION:** positive affective response to sexual engagement
- **SEXUAL PLEASURE:** physical, emotional, psychological enjoyment from sexual or erotic activities; may or may not include an orgasm

MEASURING SEX POSITIVE CONSTRUCTS

- How can these outcomes and variables around sexual pleasure be effectively and consistently measured?
 - ▣ Frequent reliance on self-report and problematic response bias.
 - ▣ Common understanding of sexual pleasure primarily focuses on orgasm.
- Dichotomous variables are commonly used.
 - ▣ “Are you sexually satisfied?”
 - ▣ Need for more nuanced scales and longitudinal studies

POSITIVE SEXUALITY and OVERALL WELLBEING



SEXUAL HEALTH:

Pleasure and Contraception

- Sexual pleasure is a major factor in the selection of a contraceptive method
- Frequent gap between efficacy and acceptability
- Eroticizing risk
 - ▣ Feels better physically, more pleasure
 - ▣ Willful disregard for safety
 - ▣ Prioritizing sense of closeness

SEXUAL HEALTH: Pleasure and Prevention

- Highlighting the ways in which certain methods may increase pleasure and/or utilizing them in a pleasurable manner
 - Erotic implements as pathway to increased sexual communication, self-efficacy and sexual self-esteem
- Both men and women's pleasure must be considered**

MENTAL HEALTH

- Bidirectional relationship between self-esteem and sexual pleasure and sexual satisfaction.
- Sexual satisfaction correlated:
 - psychological satisfaction
 - high self-esteem
 - autonomy
 - sexual assertiveness
 - comfort and openness

MENTAL HEALTH

- Sexual activity among older adults associated with:

- ▣ lower levels of depression

- ▣ higher self-worth

- ▣ sense of belonging

→ Stronger sense of SOCIAL CONNECTION

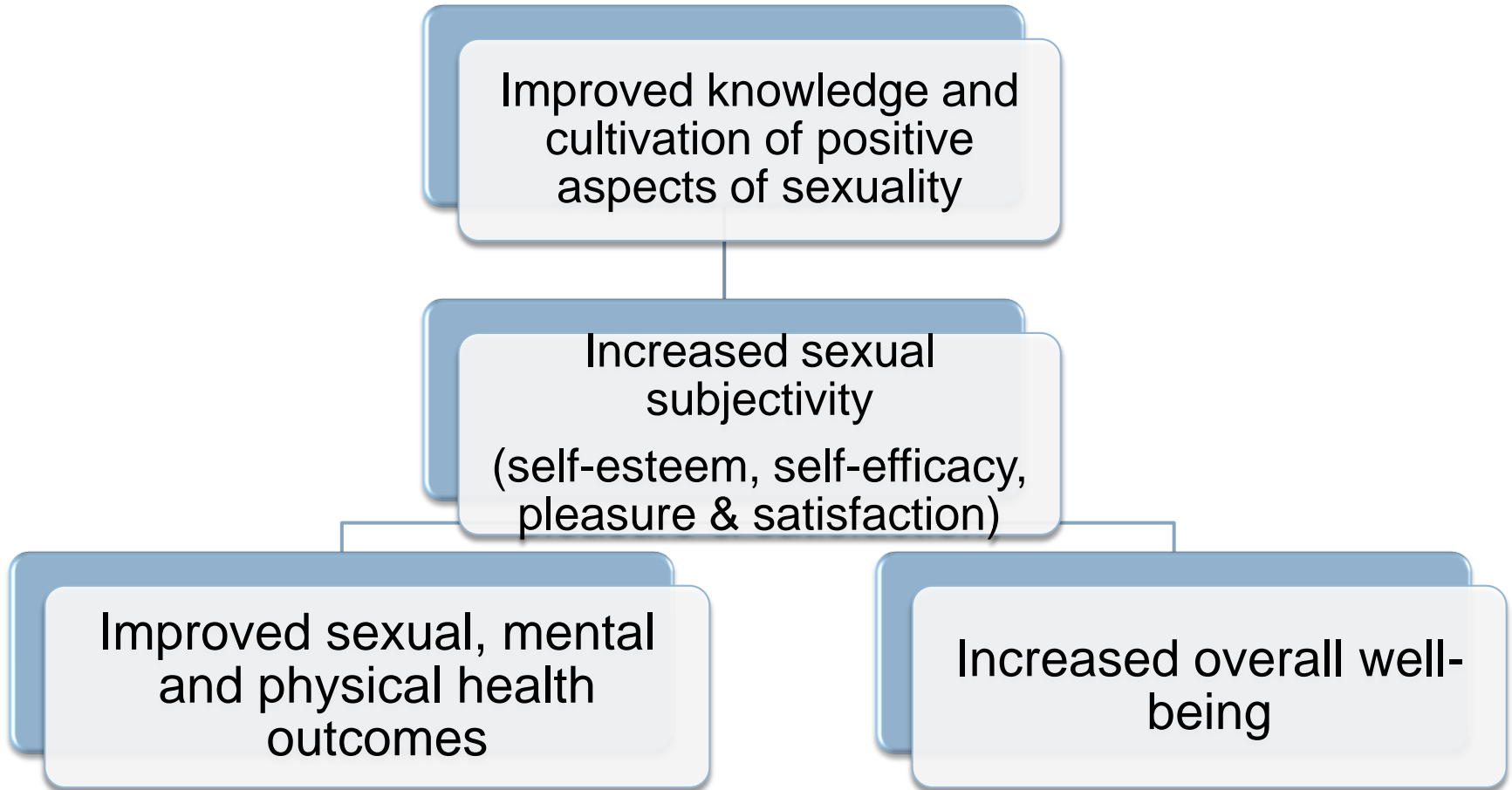
PHYSICAL HEALTH

- Balance between the risks and benefits
 - ▣ Decreased stress and anxiety
 - ▣ Sexual satisfaction can help to regulate emotion
 - ▣ Increased longevity
- Poor health status is associated with sexual dysfunction, particularly for those with:
 - ▣ Diabetes
 - ▣ Heart disease
 - ▣ Obesity
 - ▣ Depression

OVERALL WELLBEING

- Improvements in sexual, mental and physical health
- Sexual satisfaction associated with increased life satisfaction
- Sexual satisfaction associated with relationship satisfaction
 - ▣ Happiness
 - ▣ Commitment
 - ▣ Positive interactions

Framework for Positive Sexuality



RECOMMENDATIONS

- ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, NORMALIZATION and PROMOTION of sexual pleasure
- Reframing of sexuality education which would incorporate these components
 - ▣ Respectful of the realities and rights of young (and older) people
 - Culturally sensitive approach
 - Shifting sexual scripts and possibly gender norms and dynamics



Thank you for your time and attention!

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THEME 4:

THE RIGHT TO PLEASURE

- **CONNECTING RIGHT TO PLEASURE to HUMAN DIGNITY and FREEDOM**
 - sexual rights become an avenue through which to assert other rights and privileges
- **SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP cultivating SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITY**
 - learning to claim sexual agency and refuse sexual silence
 - gaining sexual self-esteem, increasing pleasure
 - better sexual health outcomes