

PUBIC HAIR DURING A PANDEMIC: COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS, INTIMATE GROOMING AND SEXUAL INTIMACY

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Background:

During COVID-19 restrictions some Australians were unable to meet sexual partners or to access beauticians for hair removal. We investigated changes to pubic hair grooming and the impact of these changes on people's self-image and intimate lives in a convenience sample of a community-based survey.

Methods:

A survey was distributed in November-December 2020 exploring the impact of COVID-19 on Australians' sexual and reproductive health. People aged 18+ were eligible to participate. Respondents were asked whether they had changed their intimate grooming as a result of the pandemic (yes/no). A follow-up free-text question allowed participants to elaborate. We used logistic regression to explore factors associated with making changes to grooming and content analysis to analyse free-text responses.

Results:

There were 256 complete responses: median age 27 years (range: 18-82), predominantly female (69.1%) and heterosexual (63.0%). 34.77% of participants (n=89) had changed their intimate grooming since the start of the pandemic, with women more likely than men (OR=4.5; 95%CI 1.8-11.0; p=0.001). A strong association was found with oral sex with those reporting a change to the amount of oral sex they were having more likely to have changed grooming than those reporting no change to the amount of oral sex (OR: 3.3; 95%CI: 1.8-6.1; p<0.001). Free-text comments revealed less grooming as the most common change, reasons being: no access to sexual partners, no access to beauty salons, and mental health impact of the pandemic. Most said their changed grooming had no impact on them or their sex lives, however others spoke of negative impacts on sexual desire, of feeling less attractive, and having less oral sex.

Conclusion:

Pubic hair grooming is connected to body image and sexual desire. Findings highlight the gendered burden of hair removal as women were more likely to experience negative impacts from not maintaining their usual grooming.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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