

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sexual practices of Australians – findings from an online survey

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Background:

In response to rising numbers of COVID-19 cases, a series of national lockdown restrictions were placed on Australians from the end of March 2020. We investigated the impact of restrictions on sexual practices during the first wave of the pandemic in Australia.

Methods:

An online survey exploring the impact of the lockdown on sexual and reproductive health and sexual practices was open between 23rd April – 11th May to over-18s living in Australia. Respondents were asked about frequency of sexual activity and specific sexual practices during lockdown; and reported whether these behaviours were different compared with 2019. Respondents were also asked about dating app use and relationship/s with sexual partners during 2019 and lockdown. Logistic regression was used to determine the difference in proportion between the two time periods, adjusting for clustering at the participant level.

Results:

A total of 1187 people commenced the questionnaire, and 965 (81.3%) completed it. Most respondents (70.0%) were female and aged 18-29 (66.3%). Over half (53.5%) reported less sex during lockdown than in 2019. Compared with 2019, respondents were more likely to report sex with a spouse (35.3% vs 41.7%; difference=6.4%; 95%CI: 3.6, 9.2) and less likely to report sex with a girl/boyfriend (45.1% vs 41.8%; diff=-3.3%; 95%CI: -7.0, -0.4) or a casual partner (31.4% vs 7.8%; diff=-23.4; 95%CI:-26.9, -19.8). Dating app use decreased overall during lockdown versus 2019 (42.1% vs 27.3%; diff= -14.8%; 95%CI: -17.6, -11.9). However, amongst users chatting/texting (89.8% vs 94.5%; diff=4.7%; 95%CI:1.0, 8.5) and organising virtual dates (2.6% vs 17.2%; diff=14.6%; 95%CI:10.1, 19.2) via the apps increased during lockdown. Solo sexual practices increased; 14.6% (123/840) reported using sex toys more often and 26.0% (218/838) reported masturbating more often.

Conclusion:

Many Australians reported changes to their sexual activity and sexual practices as a result of national COVID-19 lockdown restrictions.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.