

Orgasms in UK Women – an Online Survey

by Dr David Delvin (Family Planning MO) and Christine Webber (Psychotherapist)

Dr David Delvin

Dr David Delvin qualified in medicine during the 1960s, and trained in contraception and sexual medicine with sexual health charity FPA in the 1970s.

He is a member of the Royal College of GPs, of the College of Sexual and Relationship Therapy, and of the European Society of Contraception. Some years ago, he was elected a Fellow of the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health Care of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

He has written 34 books, mostly about sexology, and has made over 900 TV appearances.

Christine Webber

Christine Webber is a broadcaster, health writer and psychotherapist who has practised in Harley Street for the past 16 years.

After a successful career in television news, she became an agony aunt, and wrote columns in Best magazine, TV Times, The Scotsman, BBC

Parenting and Woman magazine. She has also appeared as a relationships expert on numerous TV programmes.

Currently, she and her husband Dr David Delvin have a sex and relationships column in The Spectator's health section and they also write the sex and relationships content for Europe's major health website, Netdoctor.

Christine is the author of 15 books, including How To Mend A Broken Heart, Too Young to Get Old and Get the Happiness Habit.

Introduction

Key findings from this survey of 1,250 women:

- Over 80% of women could not reach orgasm through intercourse (penetration) alone;
- The vast majority needed stimulation of the clitoris in order to orgasm;
- Most women (72%) reported difficulty in achieving a simultaneous orgasm with their partners;
- 70% of the women reported having multiple orgasms;
- Almost 40% had (at some time) ejaculated fluid at the moment of climaxing;
- About one in seven women had experienced pain during orgasm;
- Almost 3% of the women had never had an orgasm.

Why We Did the Survey

We knew that very large numbers of women have problems and anxieties about the subject of orgasm.

However, there has been very little worthwhile research about the female orgasm in the last 40 years or so, since the pioneering work of Ms Shere Hite in the United States of America in 1976.

Hite challenged the traditional view that intercourse (penetration) by itself is supposed to make women orgasm. A lot of people, including physicians, did not believe her.

Unfortunately, this 'traditional' viewpoint is still widespread throughout society. Many men and women (including, alas, some doctors) still believe the myth that for all woman, being penetrated by a penis which goes in and out should be enough to make them orgasm. This view is often encouraged by the way sex is depicted in popular culture, including pornography, romantic fiction, and film or TV in general.

As a result, a lot of women think that there is something wrong with them if they do not orgasm during intercourse. Similarly, a lot of men think that in order to make a woman orgasm, all they have to do is penetrate her and thrust repeatedly.

Indeed, in 1970 sex researchers Masters and Johnson announced that a woman who could not orgasm through intercourse alone was suffering from a 'sexual disorder'. They named this 'Coital Orgasmic Inadequacy.'

Other topics on which there's been misunderstanding include:

- Whether women need clitoral stimulation in order to orgasm;
- How common it is for women to ejaculate fluid at orgasm;
- Whether women commonly experience pain during orgasm.

How We Did the Survey

Therefore, we decided to compile a 13-point questionnaire about orgasm, and to invite a large number of UK-based women to respond to it.

The questions were drawn up with the help of a medical ethicist. The link to the questionnaire was circulated to women all over the UK with the help of the sexual health charity FPA (previously the Family Planning Association), FPA Northern Ireland, and many other organisations (please see acknowledgements at the end).

The survey was totally confidential, and we made it clear that it was open to women of any sexual orientation.

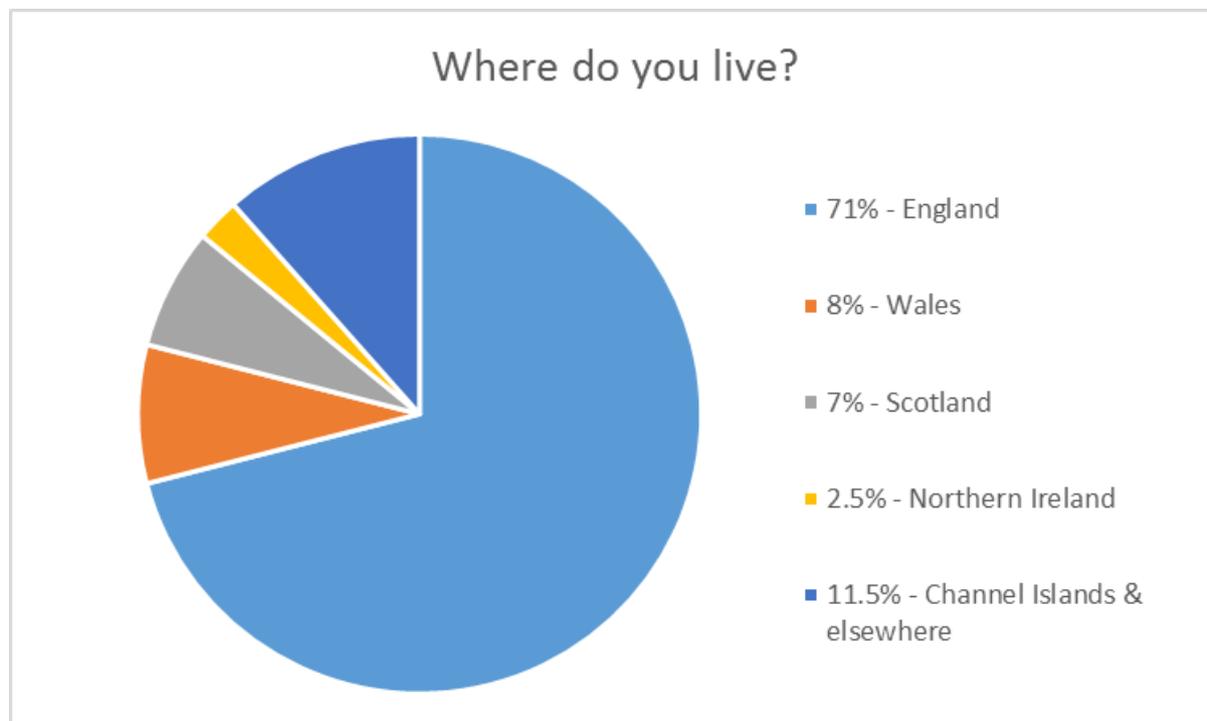
When we had received 1,250 email replies, we closed the survey and asked our statistician to analyse the results for us.

Note: of course, we do not claim that this sample is statistically representative of the UK's female population. However, it gives an interesting insight into the experiences of many women in the UK.

The Results

Here are the results for our 13 questions:

Question 1: Where do you live?

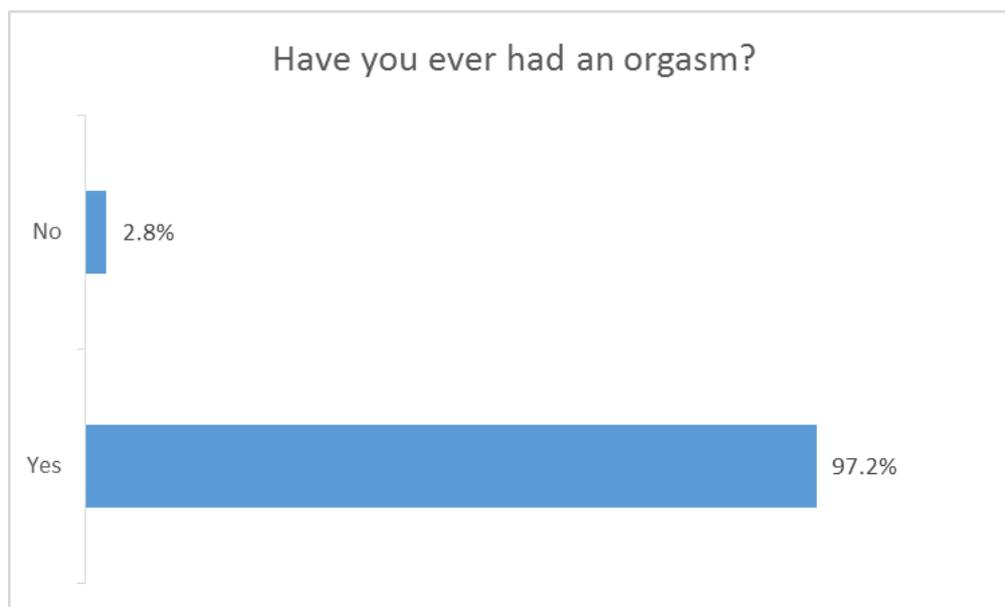


There was a good spread throughout the UK. 71% of the women lived in England, 8% in Wales, 7% in Scotland, and 2.5% in Northern Ireland. The rest replied 'elsewhere.' (This included the Channel Islands.) There were no significant differences in the way the women of the various countries responded.

Question 2: How old are you?

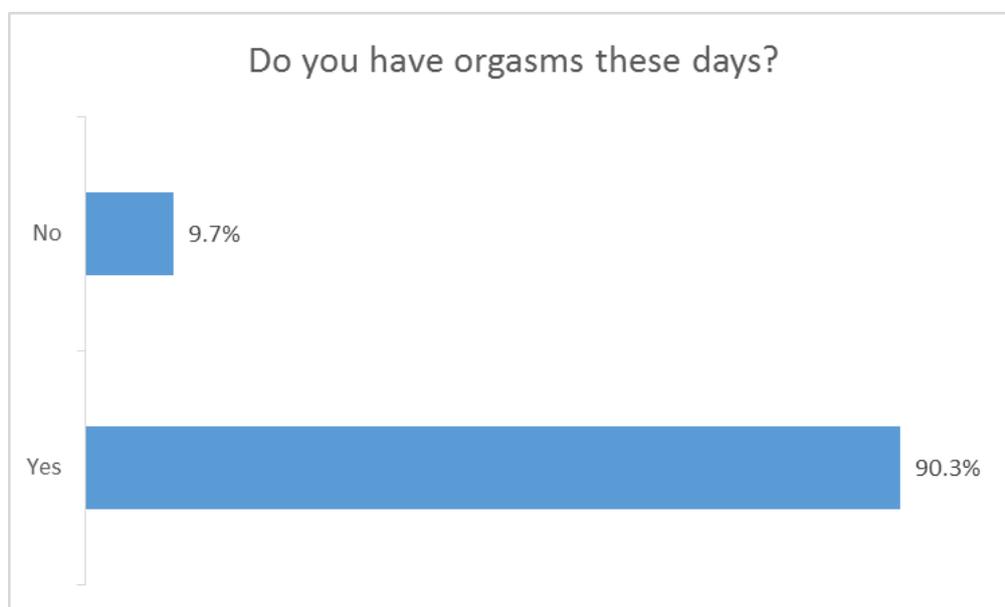
The most frequent age group was 20 – 24, but the oldest woman was in her 80s.

Question 3: Have you ever had an orgasm?



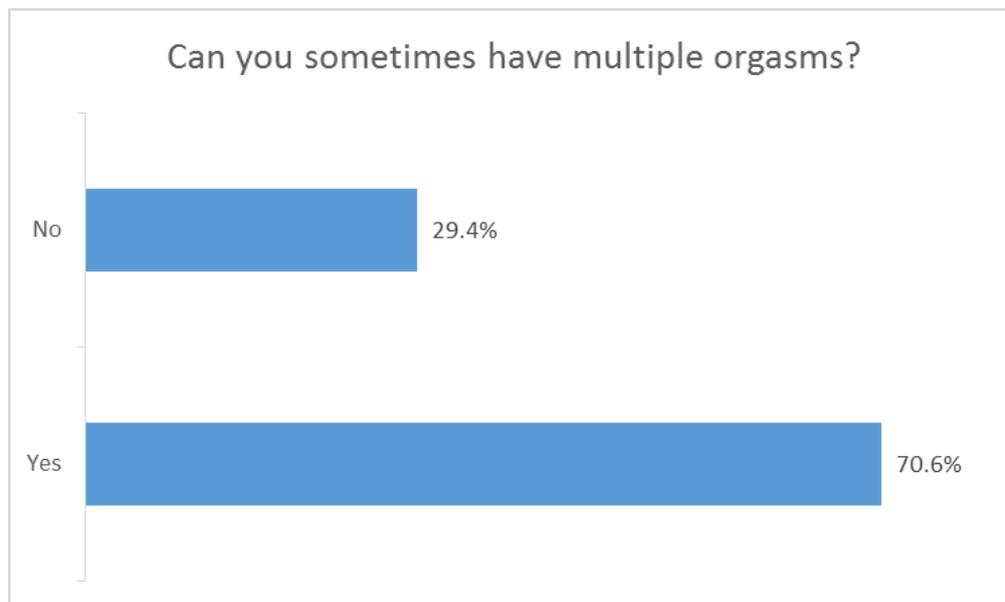
97.2% of women answered 'Yes.'

Question 4: Do you have orgasms these days?



90.3% of the women replied 'Yes.'

Question 5: Can you sometimes have multiple orgasms? (In other words, more than one in about an hour or so?)

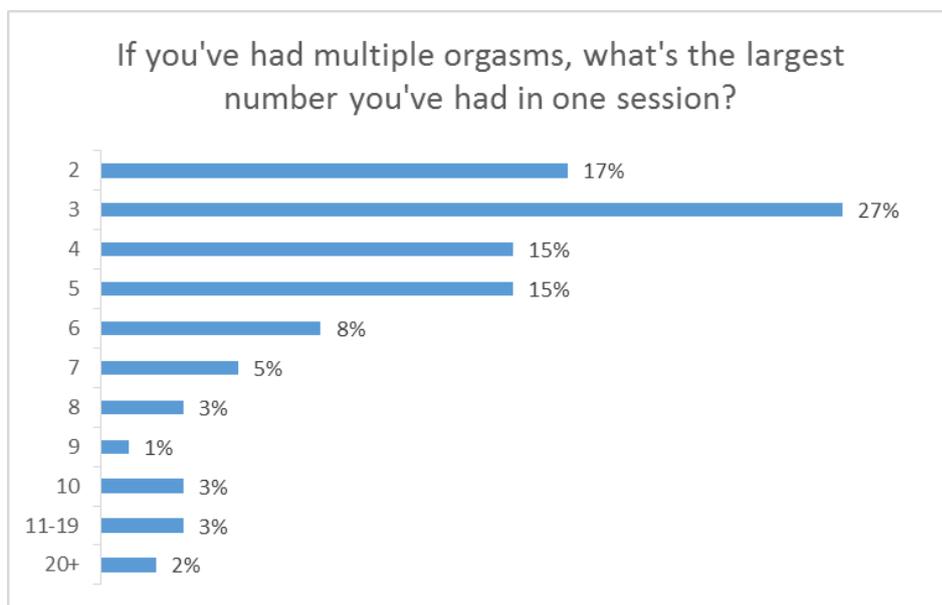


70.6% of all respondents answered 'Yes.' This is a striking finding, and we discuss it below.

Question 6: If you answered 'Yes,' how many orgasms do you usually have in a session?

The great majority (90%) of these multi-orgasmic women reported 'between one and four.' Overall, the mean was two.

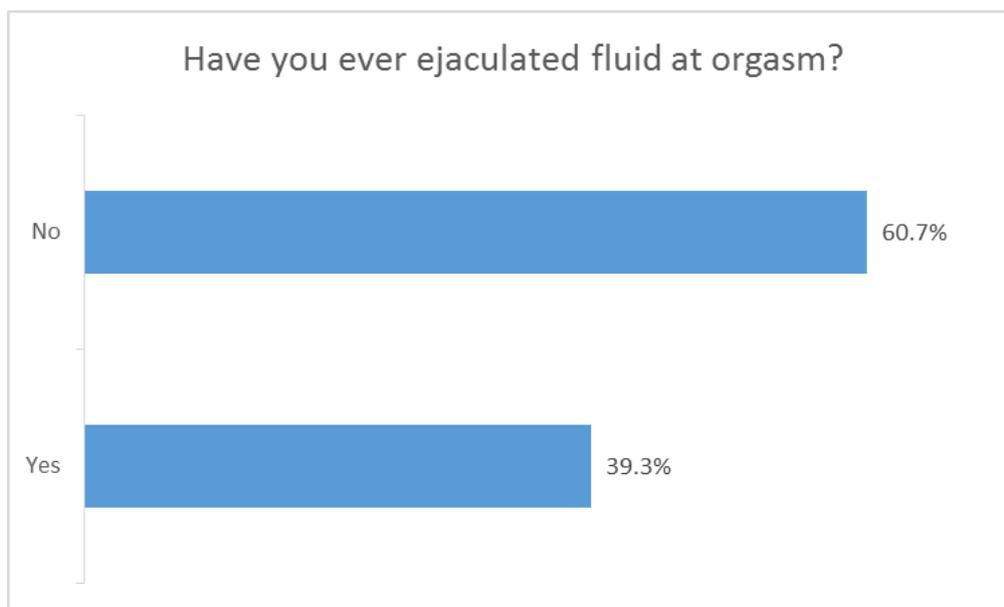
Question 7: If you answered ‘Yes’, what is the largest number of orgasms you have ever had in a session?



The most frequent answer was three orgasms (in 27% of multi-orgasmic women). But 15% of women said that they had experienced five in a session. Also, a small proportion (3%) of women reported having had 11 to 19 orgasms in a single session.

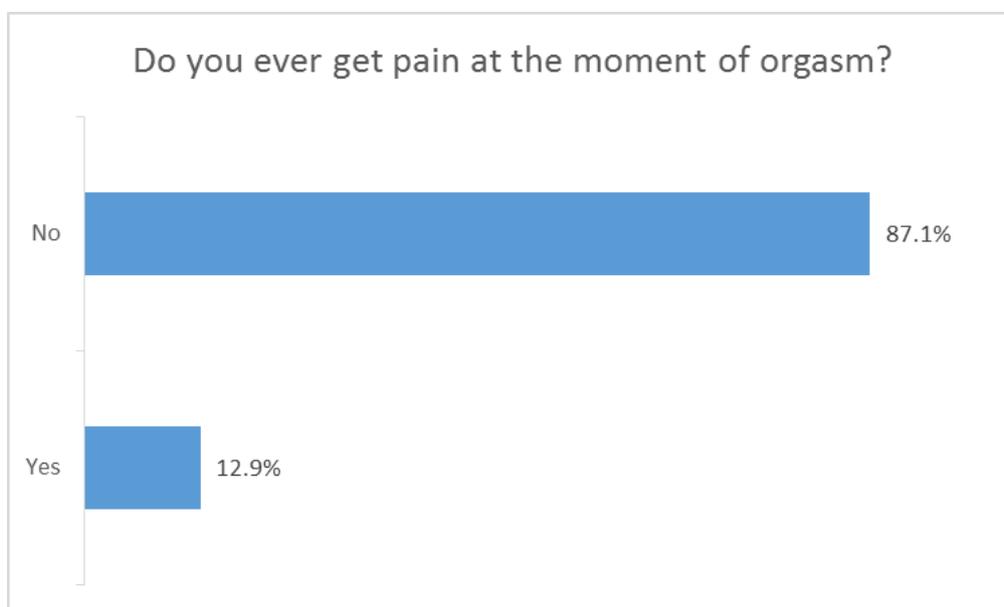
Furthermore, 2% of women indicated that they had had 20 or more. This may seem surprising to some readers, but in our clinical practice over the years we have encountered a very small number of patients who told us that they were sometimes capable of orgasming 20 or more times in a night.

Question 8: Have you ever ejaculated fluid at orgasm?



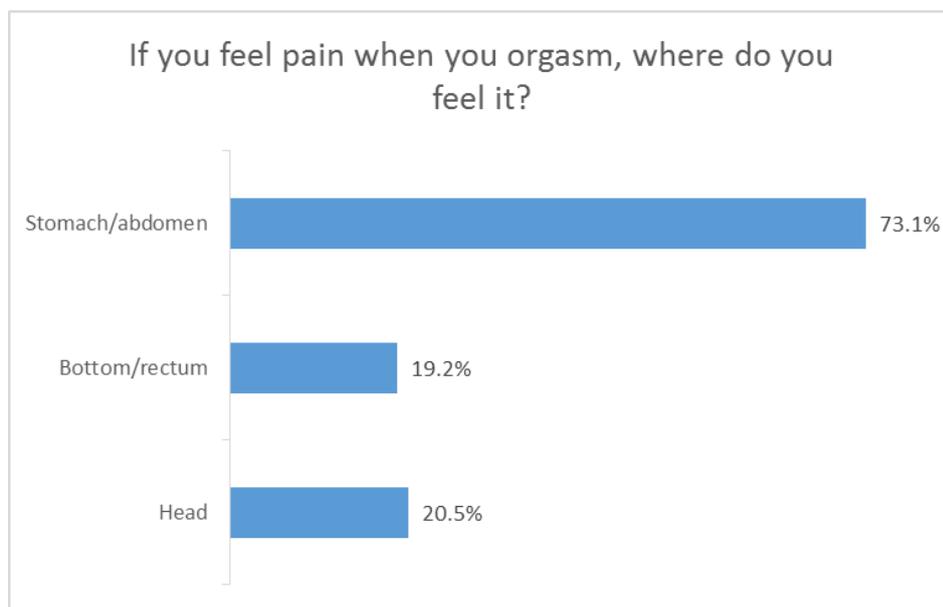
39.3% of women answered 'Yes.'

Question 9: Do you ever get pain at the moment of orgasm?



In a striking finding, 12.9% of women replied 'Yes.'

Question 10: If so, then where is the pain?

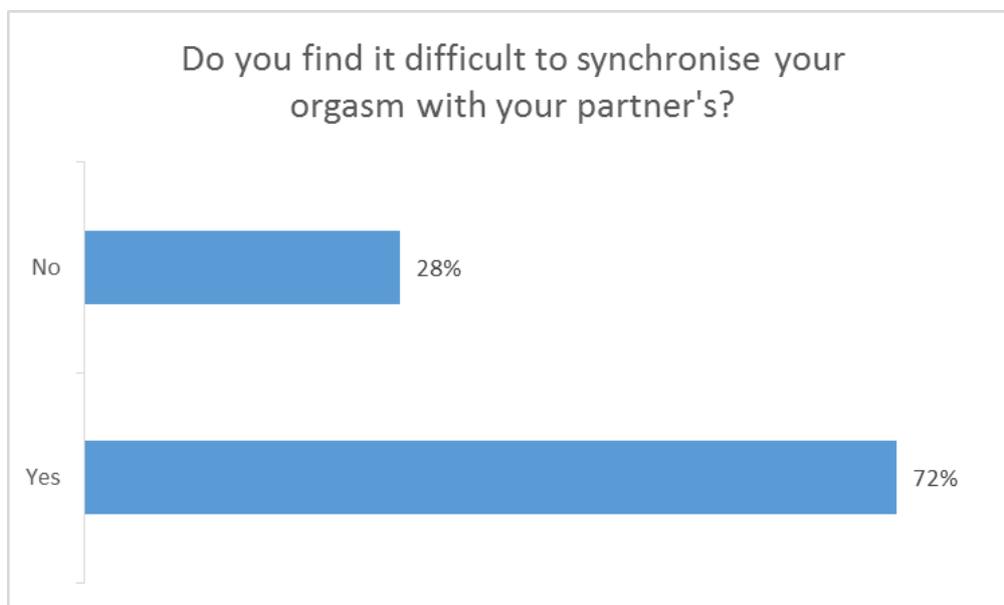


Of those women who experienced dysorgasmia (orgasmic pain):

- 73.1% said 'in the tummy/abdomen'
- 19.2% said 'in the bottom/rectum'
- 20.5% said 'in the head/headache'

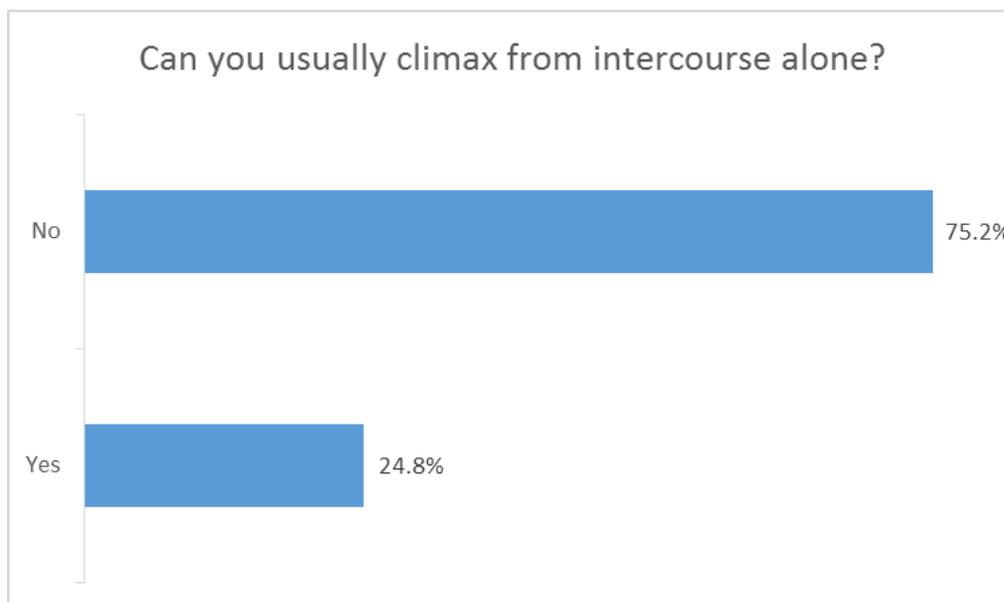
(Some respondents answered 'Yes' to more than one anatomical location.)

Question 11: Do you find it difficult to synchronise your orgasm with your partner's?



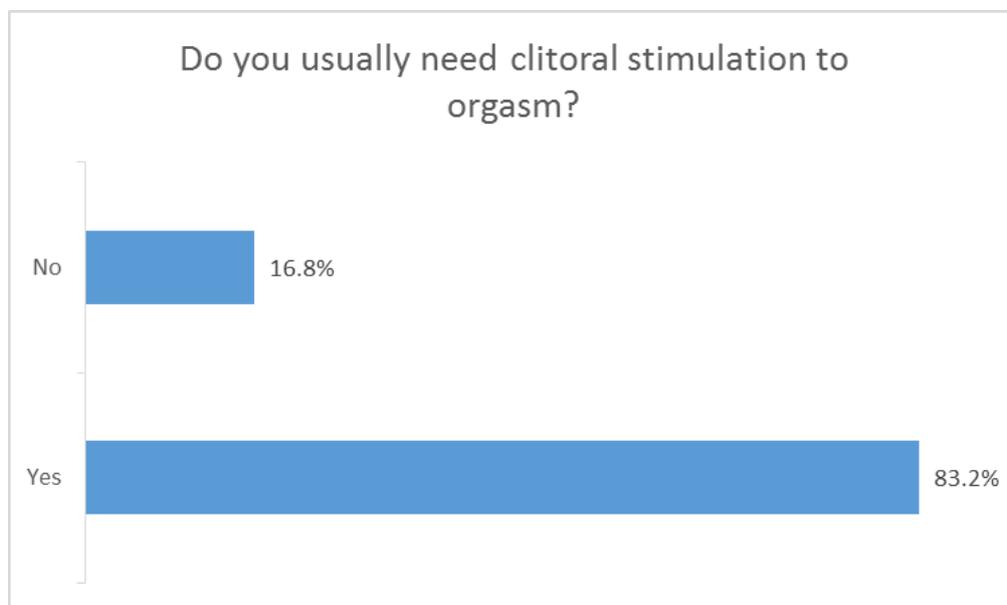
72% of women who had a current partner replied 'Yes.'

Question 12: Can you usually climax from intercourse alone?



75.2% of women said 'No.'

Question 13: Do you usually need clitoral stimulation in order to reach orgasm?



83.2% of women said 'Yes.'

Discussion

So, the main findings of this survey are as follows:

Finding One: Climaxes and the clitoris. The great majority of the women in the survey said they usually need stimulation of their clitoris if they are going to reach orgasm.

Finding Two: Multiple climaxes are common. Doctors used to think that multiple orgasms were quite rare. Kinsey (1953) reported that 14% of females regularly had them. But in our survey, 70% of the women had had them. Most commonly, they had two in a session.

Therefore, the ability to have repeated orgasms is quite widespread. In our view, women who want to experience multiple orgasms should go for it – and they may be surprised to find that they can do it!

Finding Three: Ejaculation of fluid at the moment of orgasm is quite common. We're not quite sure how common it is. But nearly 40% of women said that they had done it at some stage in their lives.

We are *not* getting into the long-standing debate about whether this fluid is urine or a glandular secretion! But the plain fact is that some form of ejaculation has happened to a lot of women when they climaxed.

Finding Four: Pain during orgasm is a fairly common symptom. It may occur in the abdomen, in the rectum – or in the head (headache).

We included this question because we have been consulted on a number of occasions by patients who experienced pain during orgasm (dysorgasmia). Most of them had recently reached the menopause, and several seemed to respond fairly well to Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

Sadly, there are hardly any references to dysorgasmia in the medical literature. But in 2009, Dr Bini Ajay and her colleagues reported that they had had some success in treating this kind of pain with amitriptyline (a tricyclic drug, which is used to treat depression and other conditions).

Take-Home Messages

We think that this trial offers take-home messages for both women and men.

Take-home messages for women:

- Don't think there's something wrong with you if you can't orgasm from vaginal penetration alone.
- For most women the clitoris is the key to sexual pleasure.
- So if you have a sexual partner, do communicate what feels good for you.
- If you feel pain when you orgasm, there is help available.

Take-home messages for men:

- Don't presume that you will make a woman climax by repeatedly thrusting your penis inside her. You probably won't. Ask her what works for her!
- If you want to make women orgasm, get to know the clitoris.

Acknowledgements

We thank the following:

- The 1,250 women who took part in our survey.
- Our statistician (Anna-Marie Jones, B Sc Hons, M Phil).
- Our ethics advisor (Dr Daniel Sokol, barrister-at-law).
- The many organisations and people who helped to distribute the questionnaire, including: FPA; FPA Northern Ireland; Mumsnet; Relationships Scotland; Public Health Wales (*Iechyd Cyhoeddus*

Cymru); Sh! Women's Emporium; Passion8; and female members of the Medical Journalists' Association and of the Guild of Health Writers.

- Our surveying company (Smart Survey Ltd.).
- Mr Tom Roper, Librarian and Researcher, Brighton & Sussex University Hospital Library.
- Dr Mike Knapton, Associate Director, British Heart Foundation.

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