# Sociodemographic and Health Correlates of Sexual Health Among Midlife Women

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1

# Background

- Sexual health – fundamental to health and wellbeing
- Understanding midlife women's sexual health is an important health goal
  - $\geq$ 80% of women aged 50-60 recently sexually active (Call, Sprecher, & Schwartz, 1995; Johannes & Avis, 1997)
  - 9.7 million women aged 50-74 report sexual complaints (Berman, Berman, & Goldstein, 1999)
  - Higher prevalence of sexual dysfunction among women vs. men (Kingsberg, 2002)

# Background, cont.

- Factors expected to influence midlife women's sexual health
  - Age
    - Menopause
    - Health status (self & partner)
    - Attitudes towards body
  - Union status and relationship quality
  - Other demographic factors (e.g., race/ethnicity and educational attainment)
  - Cohort effects

# Primary Aim

Examine the extent to which midlife women's sociodemographic characteristics and health status are associated with sexual health in a nationally representative sample of women.

# Secondary Aim

Compare the results for midlife women with those obtained for younger women to explore whether the effects of socioeconomic factors and health status on sexual health differ by age group.

# Data

- National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS)
  - Cross-sectional, household survey administered in 1992
  - Multistage, clustered sample design
  - Representative of United States adults aged 18 to 59
    - Midlife women sample aged 40 to 59
    - Younger women sample aged 18 to 30
  - Oversample of blacks and Hispanics
  - Response rate:  78.6%;  N: 3,432

# Measures

- Outcome variables (sexual health)
    1. Sexually active during previous 12 months
    2. Frequency of sexual activity
    3. Degree of physical pleasure
    4. Degree of emotional satisfaction
- Independent variables
    - Age
    - Union status
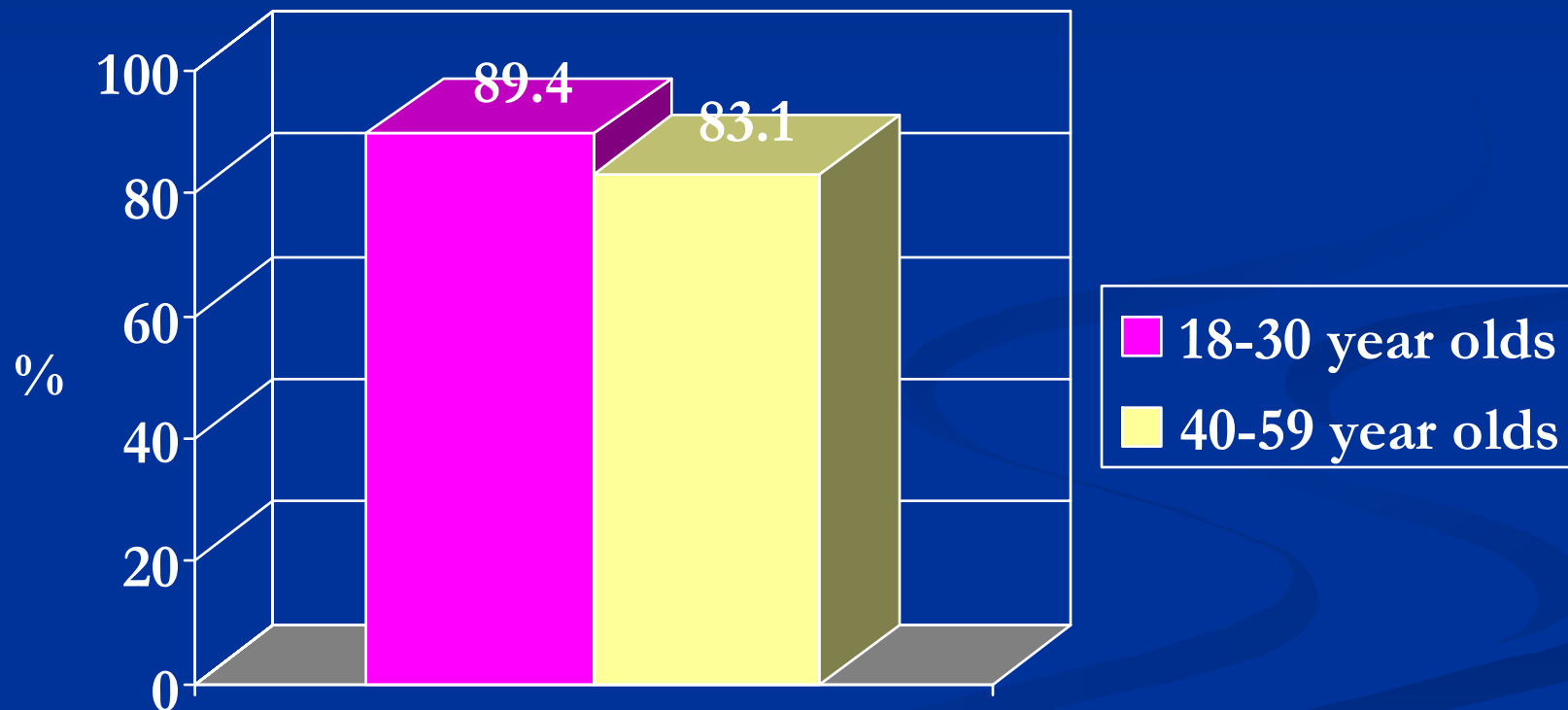    - Health status
    - Other sociodemographic measures

# Analysis

- Univariate frequencies and bivariate associations for each age group
- Logistic regression models for each outcome among both age groups
- Stata 9.2
- Analyses weighted to provide US population estimates and account for complex sample design
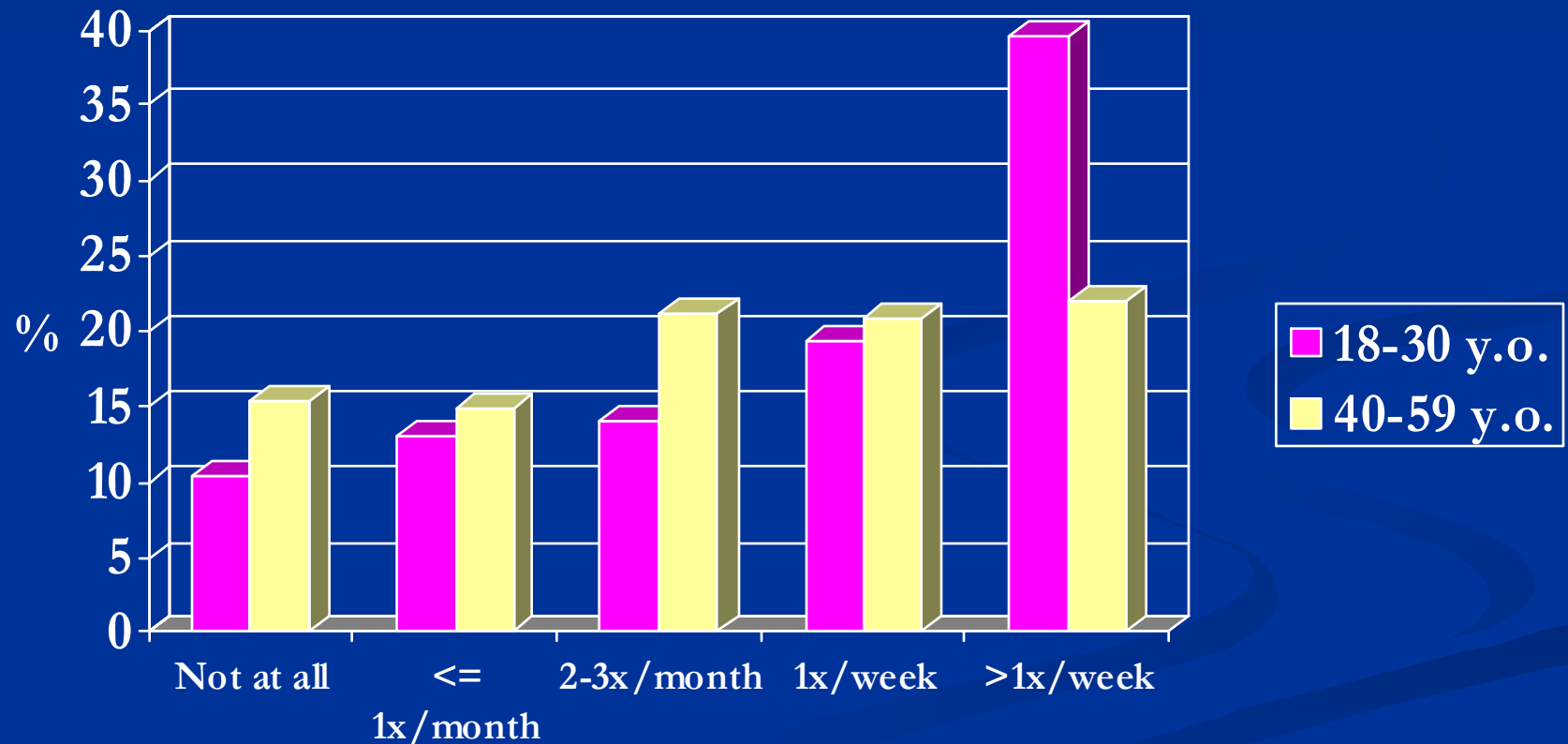
# Results

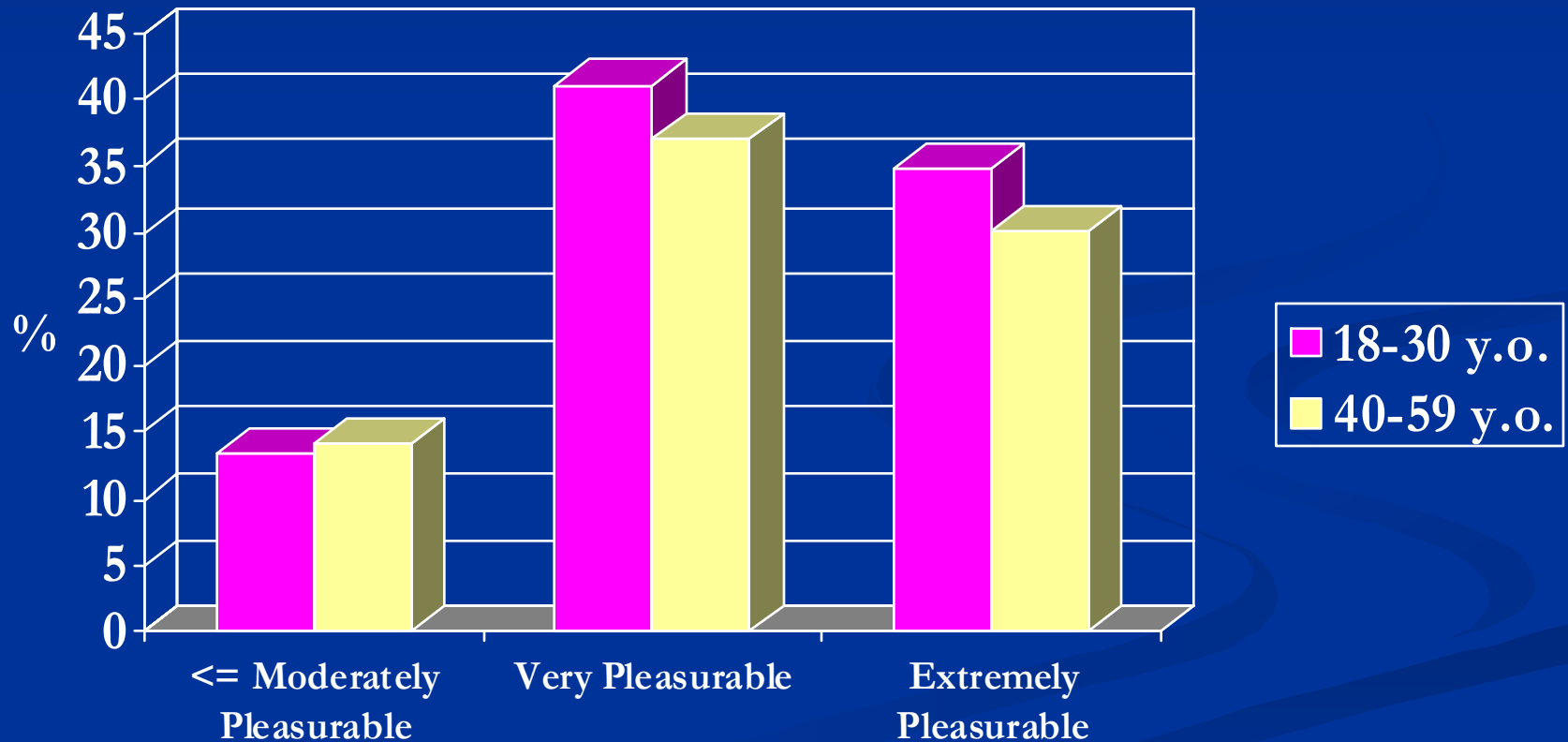## Sexually Active in Past 12 Months



Bar chart showing percentage sexually active: 18-30 year olds (magenta) 89.4; 40-59 year olds (yellow) 83.1. Y-axis labeled % from 0 to 100.

# Results, cont.

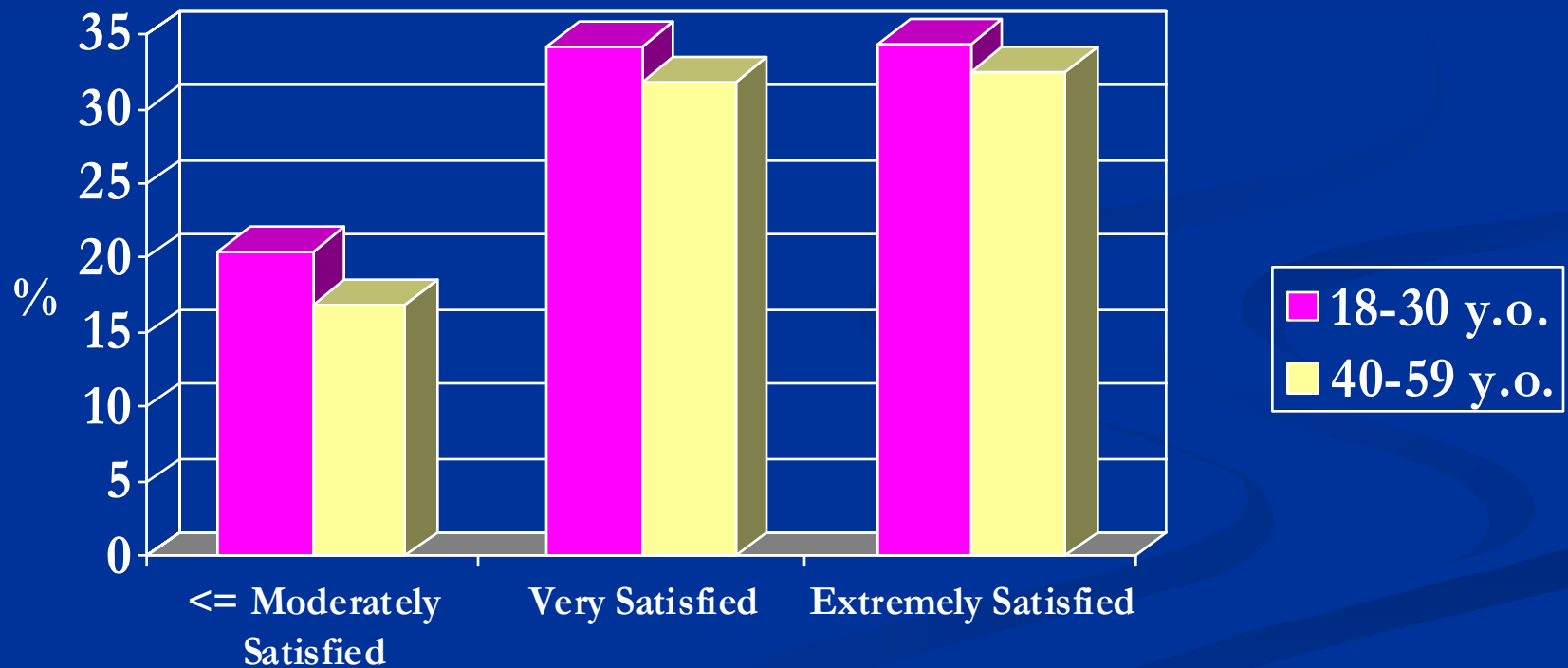**Distribution of Sexual Activity in Past Month**

# Results, cont.

**Distribution of Degree of Physical Pleasure**

# Results, cont.

**Distribution of Degree of Emotional Satisfaction**

# Results, cont.

- **Distribution of Variables**
  - Midlife sample skews younger
  - Approx. ¾ of both samples NH white
    - Younger sample has higher proportion Hispanic
  - Midlife women twice as likely to report fair or poor health
  - Midlife sample has higher proportion of college graduates
  - Midlife sample has higher household income

# Results, cont.

- **Distribution of Variables, cont.**
  - Union status
    - Never married:
      - 42% of younger sample
      - 6% of midlife sample
    - Currently married/cohabiting:
      - 53% of younger sample
      - 74% of midlife sample
    - Divorced, separated, or widowed:
      - 6% of younger sample
      - 20% of midlife sample

# Results, cont.

| Table 1. Adjusted Odds Ratios—Sexually Active. | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age (18-24/40-44) | 18-30 y.o. | 40-59 y.o. |
| 25-30 | 3.35** | |
| 45-49 | | 0.52 |
| 50-54 | | 0.41* |
| 55-59 | | 0.09*** |
| Union status (Married/cohabiting) | | |
| Never married | ------------------- | 0.01*** |
| Divorced/separated/widowed | ------------------- | 0.05*** |
| Health status (Excellent) | | |
| Good | 1.72 | 0.64 |
| Fair or poor | 2.40 | 1.12 |

*p<=.05; **p<=.05; ***p<=.001

# Results, cont.

| Table 2.  Adjusted Odds Ratios – Frequency of Sexual Activity. | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age (18-24/40-44) | 18-30 y.o. | 40-59 y.o. |
| 25-30 | 1.04 | |
| 45-49 | | 0.95 |
| 50-54 | | 0.73 |
| 55-59 | | 0.42*** |
| Union status (Married/cohabiting) | | |
| Never married | 0.23*** | 0.23** |
| Divorced/separated/widowed | 0.17*** | 1.00 |
| Health status (Excellent) | | |
| Good | 0.83 | 0.87 |
| Fair or poor | 0.37*** | 1.08 |

*p<=.05; **p<=.05; ***p<=.001

# Results, cont.

| Table 3. Adjusted Odds Ratios – Physical Pleasure. | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age (18-24/40-44) | 18-30 y.o. | 40-59 y.o. |
| 25-30 | 0.88 | |
| 45-49 | | 0.65 |
| 50-54 | | 0.60 |
| 55-59 | | 0.45** |
| Union status (Married/cohabiting) | | |
| Never married | 0.65 | 0.43 |
| Divorced/separated/widowed | 0.39* | 0.95 |
| Health status (Excellent) | | |
| Good | 0.77 | 0.84 |
| Fair or poor | 0.44* | 0.75 |

*p<=.05; **p<=.05; ***p<=.001

# Results, cont.

| Table 4.  Adjusted Odds Ratios - Emotional Satisfaction. | | |
|---|---|---|
| Age (18-24/40-44) | 18-30 y.o. | 40-59 y.o. |
| 25-30 | 1.38 | |
| 45-49 | | 0.85 |
| 50-54 | | 0.84 |
| 55-59 | | 0.48** |
| Union status (Married/cohabiting) | | |
| Never married | 0.68 | 0.55 |
| Divorced/separated/widowed | 0.40* | 0.72 |
| Health status (Excellent) | | |
| Good | 0.83 | 0.80 |
| Fair or poor | 0.54 | 0.61 |

*p<=.05; **p<=.05; ***p<=.001

# Discussion

- Midlife women report a high degree of sexual health
- Among midlife women, age has the strongest effect on sexual health
- Union status affects likelihood and frequency of sexual activity among midlife women
- Health status not associated with midlife women's sexual health

# Discussion, cont.

- There is still much to be learned about how changes in women's lives at midlife impact their sexual health

- Recommend additional nationally representative studies that include larger number of midlife women and include additional measures of midlife change