

Over 1 in 3 Japanese couples permanently sexless

We've finally collated the results of the government's biannual survey on people's lifestyles. It's a poll that finds out about the sexual awareness and activity of 3,000 men and women aged from 16 to 49 from across Japan. I'm going to use this column to report on the results of this survey, starting with the sexless issue this week.

The survey is carried out under the auspices of the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry and I led one of the survey teams. We started the survey by dividing the country up into blocks, then selected 150 municipalities from each based on their population make-up. Of the municipalities that allowed open viewing of the basic residency records, we randomly selected 20 people to take part in the survey. Inspectors visited the homes of those selected and provided them with the survey documents, which were to be returned by hand several days later. With the long-term absentees, those who moved house and the unknown residents eliminated, we received 2,713 replies, of which 1,409 were valid for a respondency rate of 51.9 percent.

The survey told us a lot about what's going on for Japanese today. Sexlessness is one issue. The Japan Society of Sexual Science defines sexlessness as being "at least one month where there has been no consensual sex (including petting, oral sex and sleeping together naked) between a couple and no likelihood of any for the foreseeable future." For our survey, there were 1,213 of 1,409 valid respondents who had sexual experience. We asked them how much sex they'd had in the past month. Of the respondents, 14.7 percent had sex once, 12 percent twice, 8.7 percent three times, 7.2 percent four times and 10.6 percent at least five times. There was 39.7 percent who had not had sex at all. Combined with those who were still virgins, 48.1 percent of Japanese had no sex for the past month.

Both the unmarried and the married are surveyed, so it was totally natural to have respondents with no sexual experience at all. However, amongst the married, we should assume that without some special reason, like a business trip or hospitalization, it is perfectly natural to have sex, so taking away those who couldn't have sex we were left with the 34.6 percent of couples who simply chose not to have intimate relations. Looking at sexlessness by age and the situation gets worse, with 45.5 percent of those 45 or over sexless.

This survey is carried out every two years. During the most recent survey, only 31.9 percent were sexless. Going back even further, to 2001, when the Asahi Shimbun newspaper carried out an online survey on sexlessness among 1,000 people, the rate was just 28 percent. These results show Japanese couples are increasingly shunning sex. This year's survey did not try and find out why. The Asahi's survey, however, found the main reasons men chose sexlessness was because sex was a nuisance, they were tired from work or their sex life had simply faded away after childbirth. Women, meanwhile, told the same poll that they also felt sex was a nuisance and had not pursued it after childbirth, but also expressed more interest in their hobbies and had come to feel their partner was more like a relative than a lover. I bet the same reasons would still apply in 2007. I think before any discussion about the country's declining birthrate, it's really important to analyze why couples aren't communicating and why the Japanese have become so inactive sexually. (By Dr. Kunio Kitamura, special to the Mainichi)

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