Sexuality: An Overlooked Aspect of Women's Health
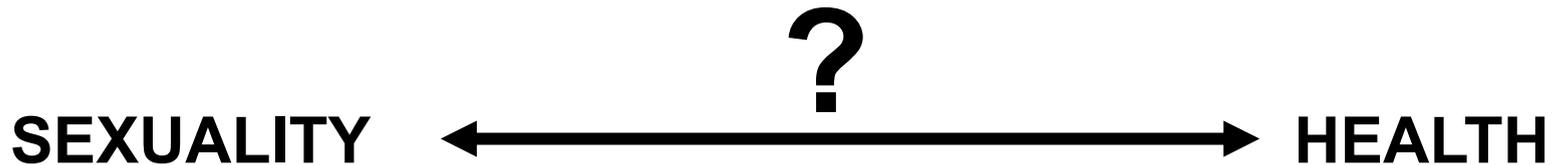
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Is sexuality an "integral part" of health at older ages?

?

SEXUALITY ←——————————→ **HEALTH**

2001 U.S. Surgeon General's* Report on Sexual Health

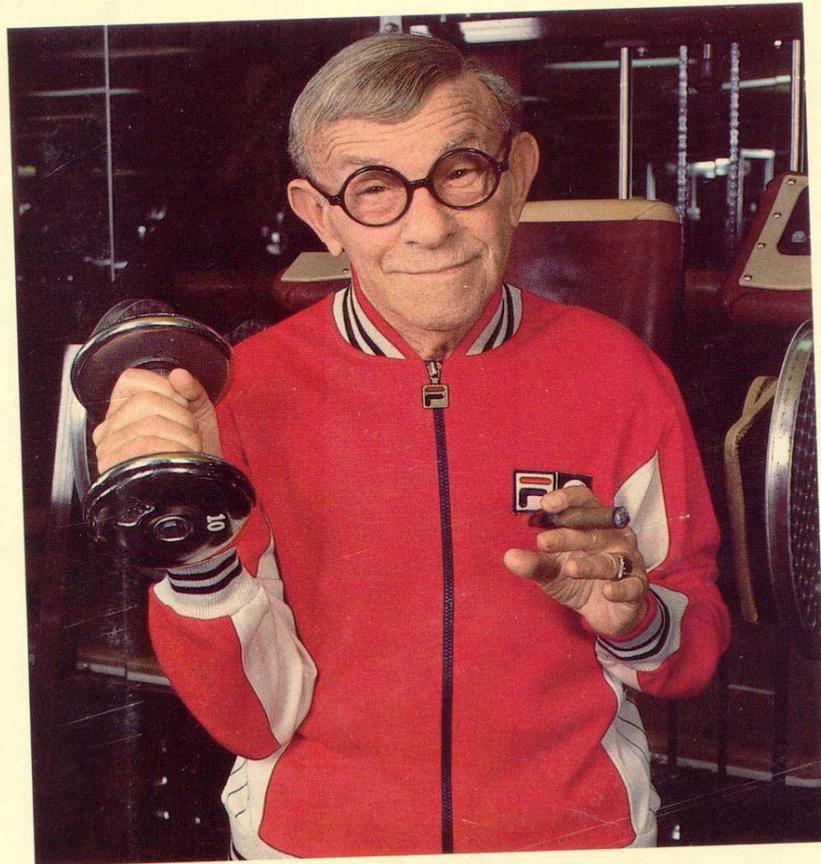**Key aspect of overall health of individuals and societies**

Access to sexual health is an issue of equity and social justice; requires personal responsibility

Sexuality is an "integral part" of overall health throughout the life course

*David Satcher, MD, PhD, former RWJ Clinical Scholar

HOW TO LIVE TO BE 100-
Or More

The Ultimate Diet, Sex and Exercise Book*

GEORGE BURNS

*At my age, sex gets second billing

MIDUS Pilot Project

Investigators: S.T. Lindau, N.S. Gavrilova

Specific Aims

I. Describe prevalence of sexual:

A) activity

B) behavior

C) problems

II. Explore association between health and sexuality

Midlife in the United States
A National Study of Health & Well-Being

National survey conducted in 1994/95

7,189 Americans aged 25-74
    core national sample (N=3,485)
    city oversamples (N=957)

Strata: age, self-reported health status

Control variables: partner status, partner health, race, education

![MIDUS logo — Midlife in the United States: A National Study of Health & Well-Being](#)

A 30-40 minute telephone survey

Number of respondents: 4,242

A 114 page mail survey

Number of respondents: 3,690

Domains of Inquiry

Social Networks

Physical Health Sexuality

Personal beliefs

Work and Finances

Children

Marriage

Religion

Childhood family background

Psychological turning

Community involvement

Neighborhood

Life overall

MIDUS SAMPLE POPULATION DISTRIBUTIONS (%)

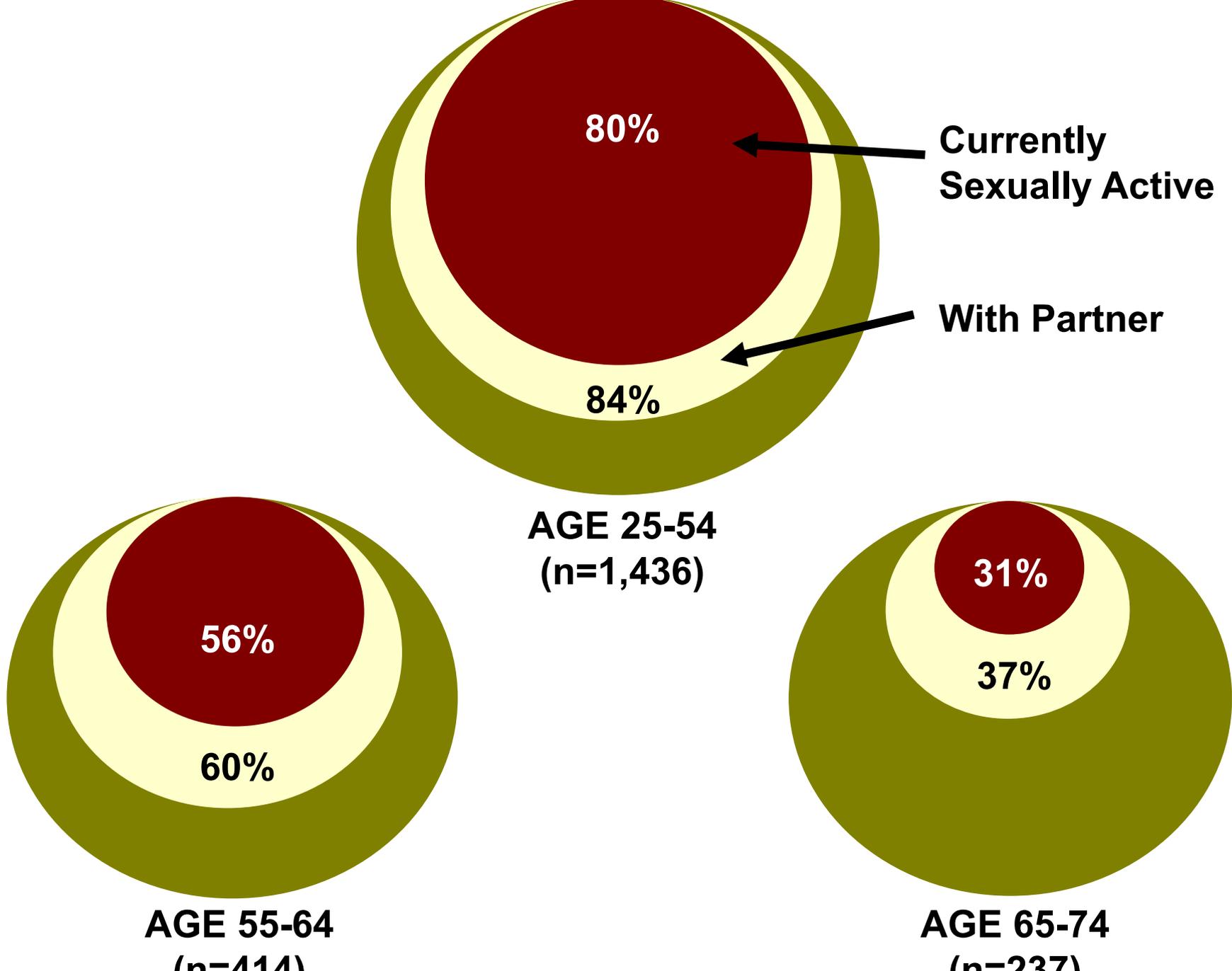**Women Aged 25-74   (n=2,087)**

AGE	
25-54	68.8
55-64	19.8
65-74	11.4
RACE/ETHNICITY	
White	86.9
African-American	7.7
Other	8.9
RELATIONSHIP STATUS	
Married	54.2
Other intimate relationship	4.7

80%

Currently Sexually Active

With Partner

84%

**AGE 25-54
(n=1,436)**

56%

60%

**AGE 55-64
(n=414)**

31%

37%

**AGE 65-74
(n=237)**

Frequency of sex with a partner*
Women Aged 25-74

Frequency of sex over the past 6 months	Age Groups		
	25-54 (n=1,217)	55-64 (n=374)	65-74 (n=199)
Less than once a month	10.5	15.9	24.6
Once a month	7.9	16.8	21.3
2-3 times a month	21.2	27.9	23.0
Once a week	22.9	23.6	23.0
2+ times a week	37.6	15.9	8.2

* Percentages for those who are sexually active

Self-rated Health
by age and sexual activity
Women Aged 25-74

mean self-rated health (10-point)

7.6
7.4
7.2
7
6.8
6.6
6.4

25-54   55-64   65-74

■ sexually active
■ sexually non-active
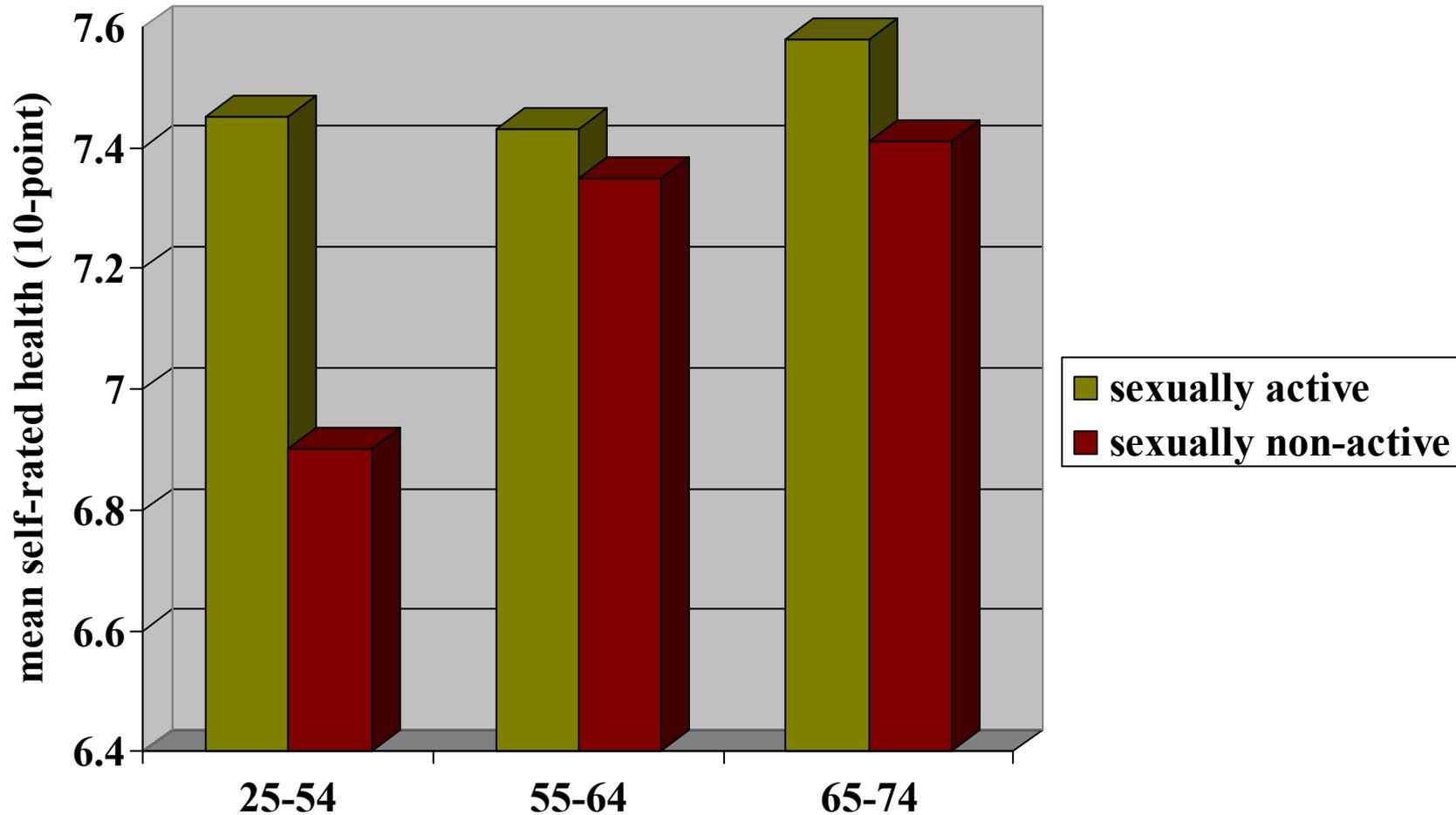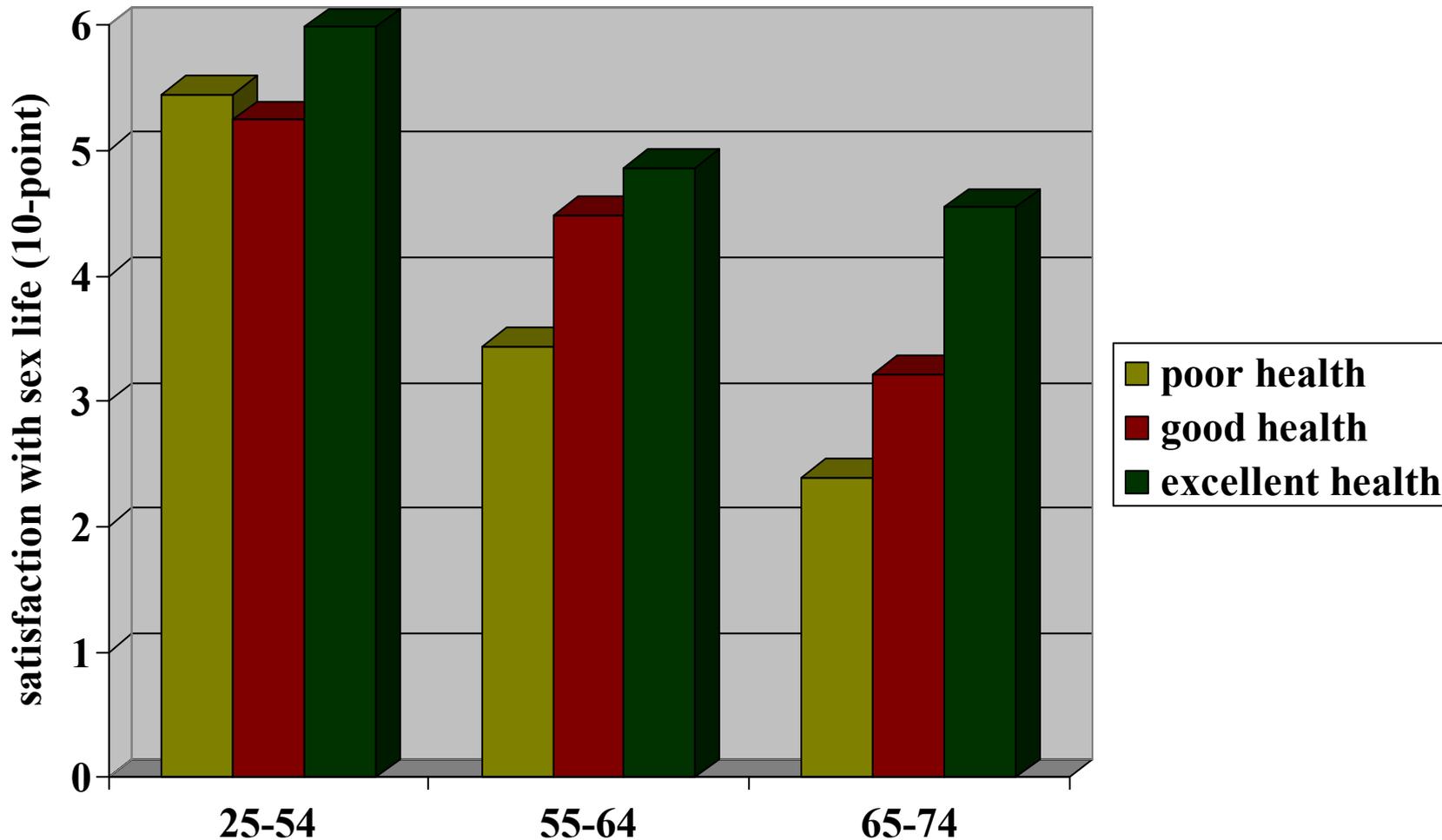
Proportion of Sexually Active Women
by age and self-rated physical health
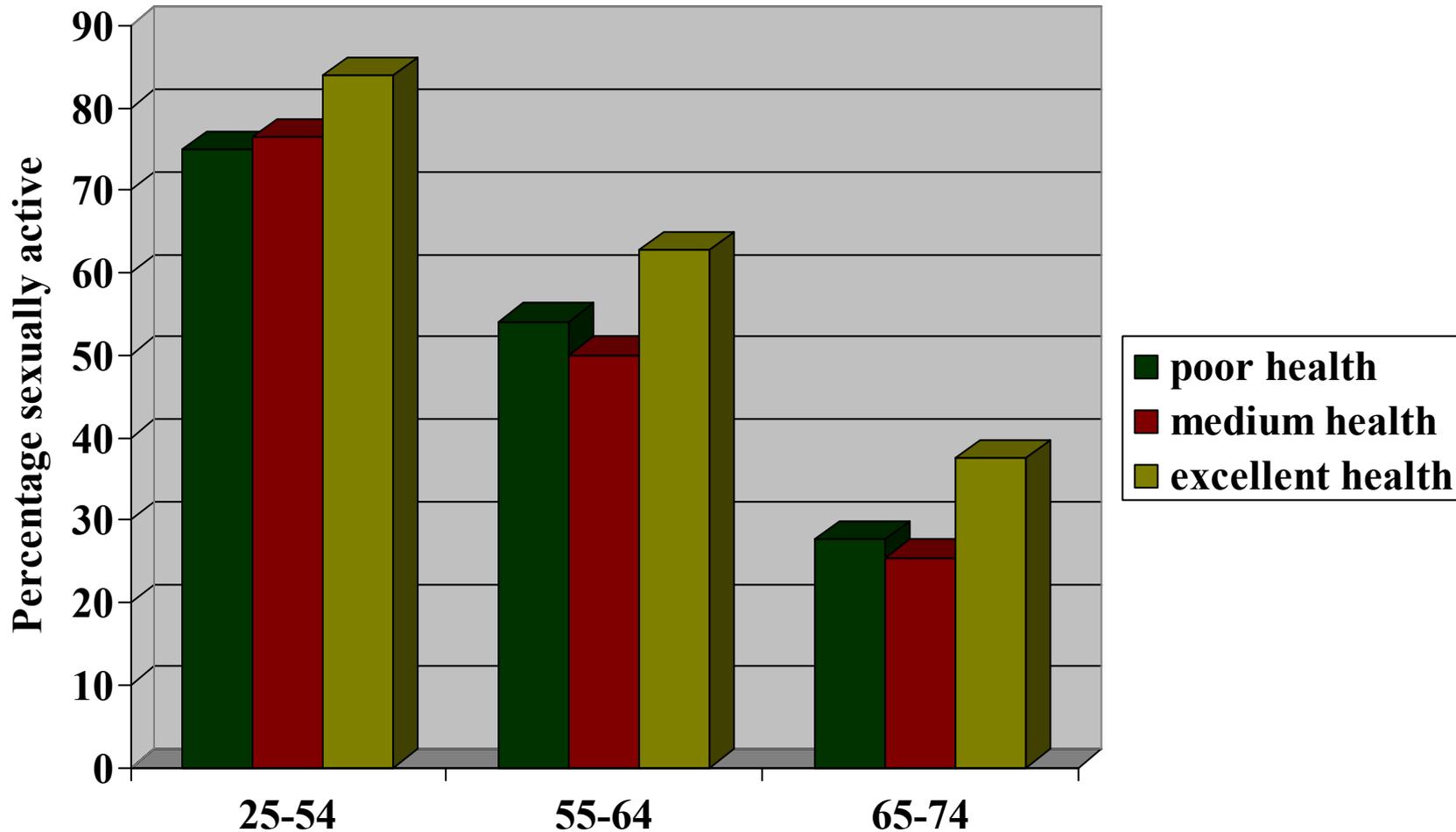
Satisfaction with sexual aspect of life
## by age and self-rated health
Women Aged 25-74

MIDUS: Univariate analyses show association between health and sexual activity

Sexually active women more likely to report good physical health than sexually inactive women (57.3% vs. 42.7%, p<.05).

# How to Compare Sexual Activity Across Populations?

We suggest to use a new measure – **Sexually Active Life Expectancy** (SALE)

Calculated using the Sullivan method

Based on self-reported prevalence of having sex over the last 6 months (MIDUS and NSHAP studies)

Life tables for the U.S. population in 1995 and 2003 (from Human Mortality Database)

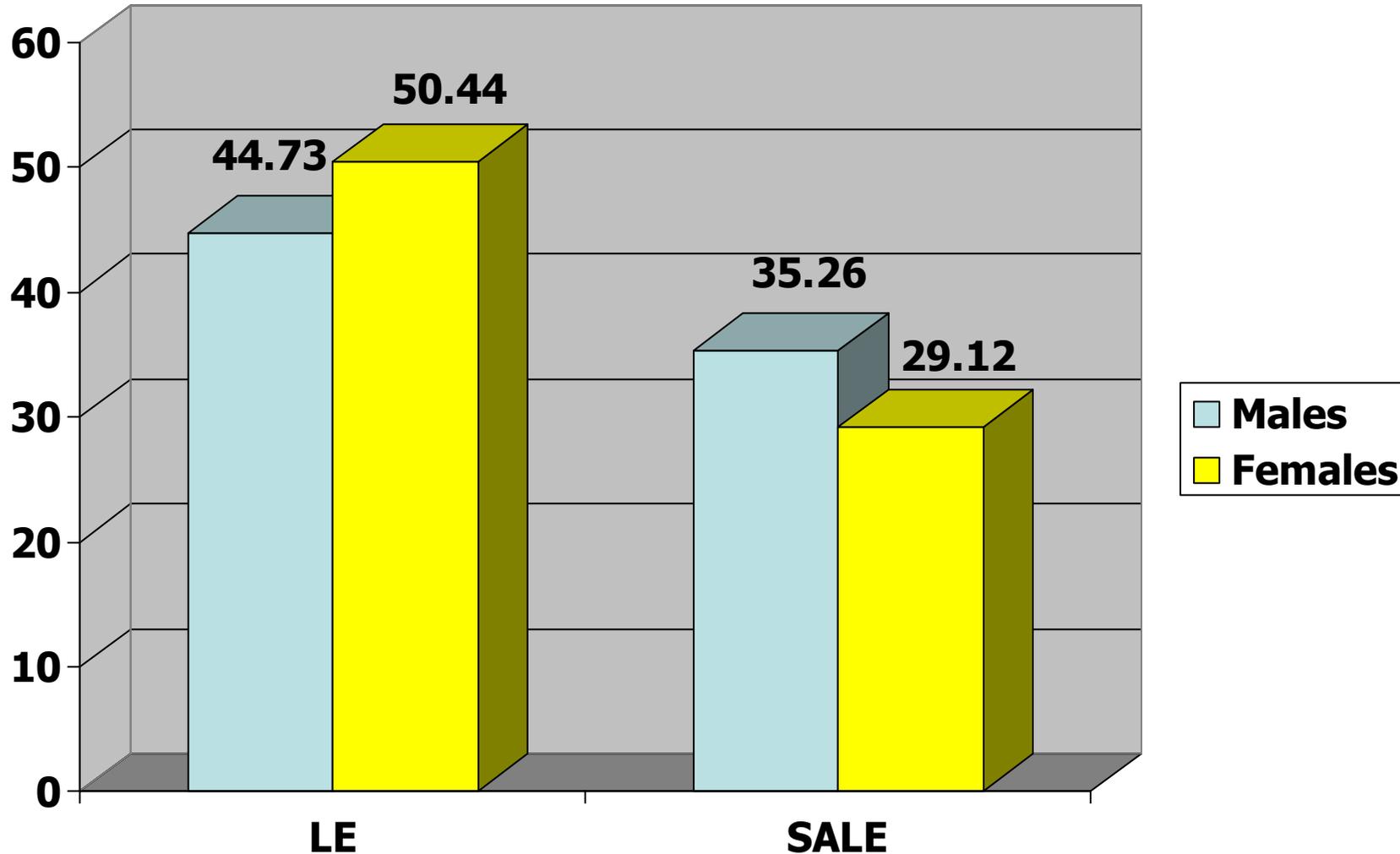# Prevalence of Sexual Activity by Age and Gender (MIDUS 1)
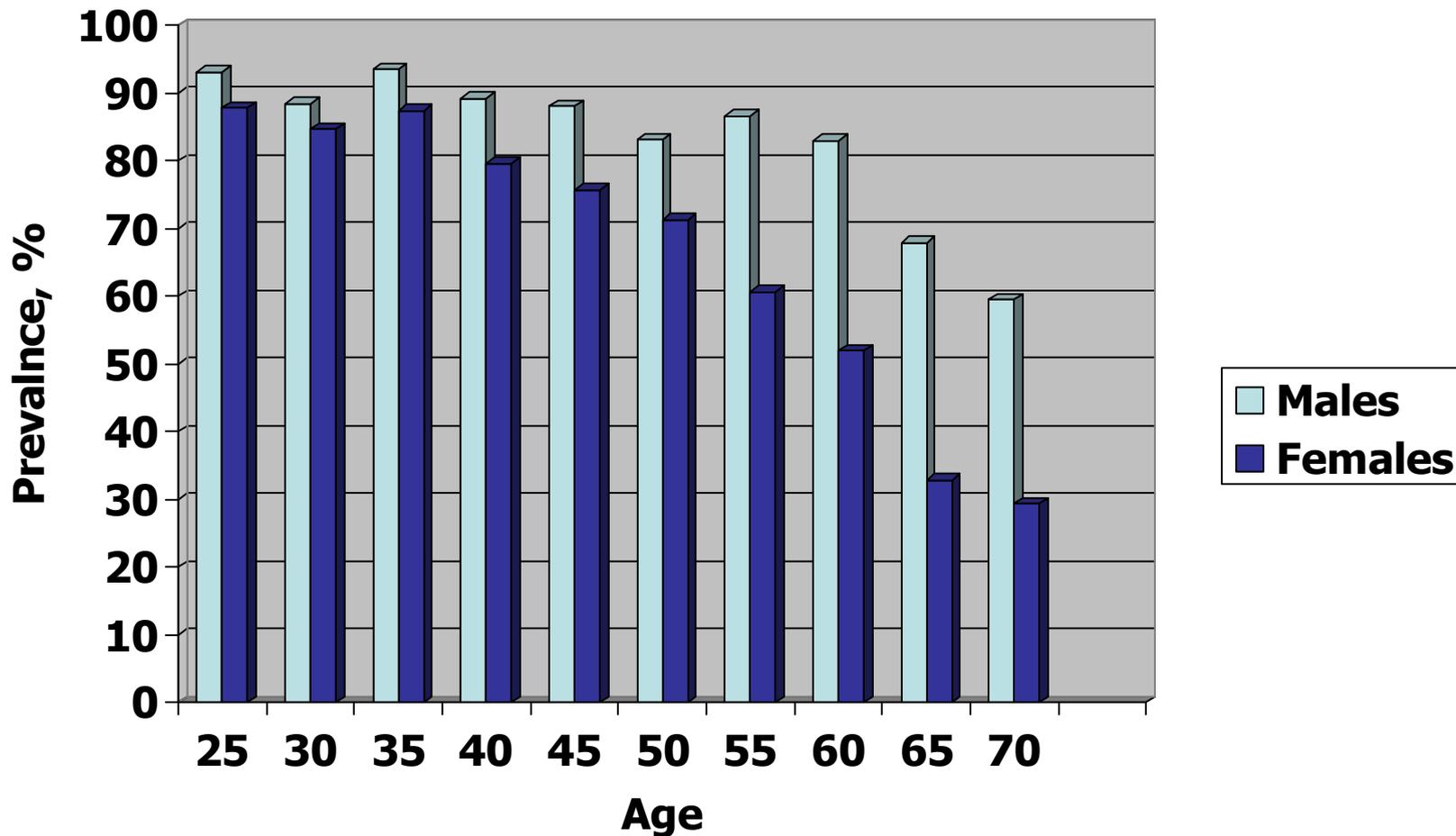
Prevalence of Sexual Activity by Age and Gender (MIDUS 1)
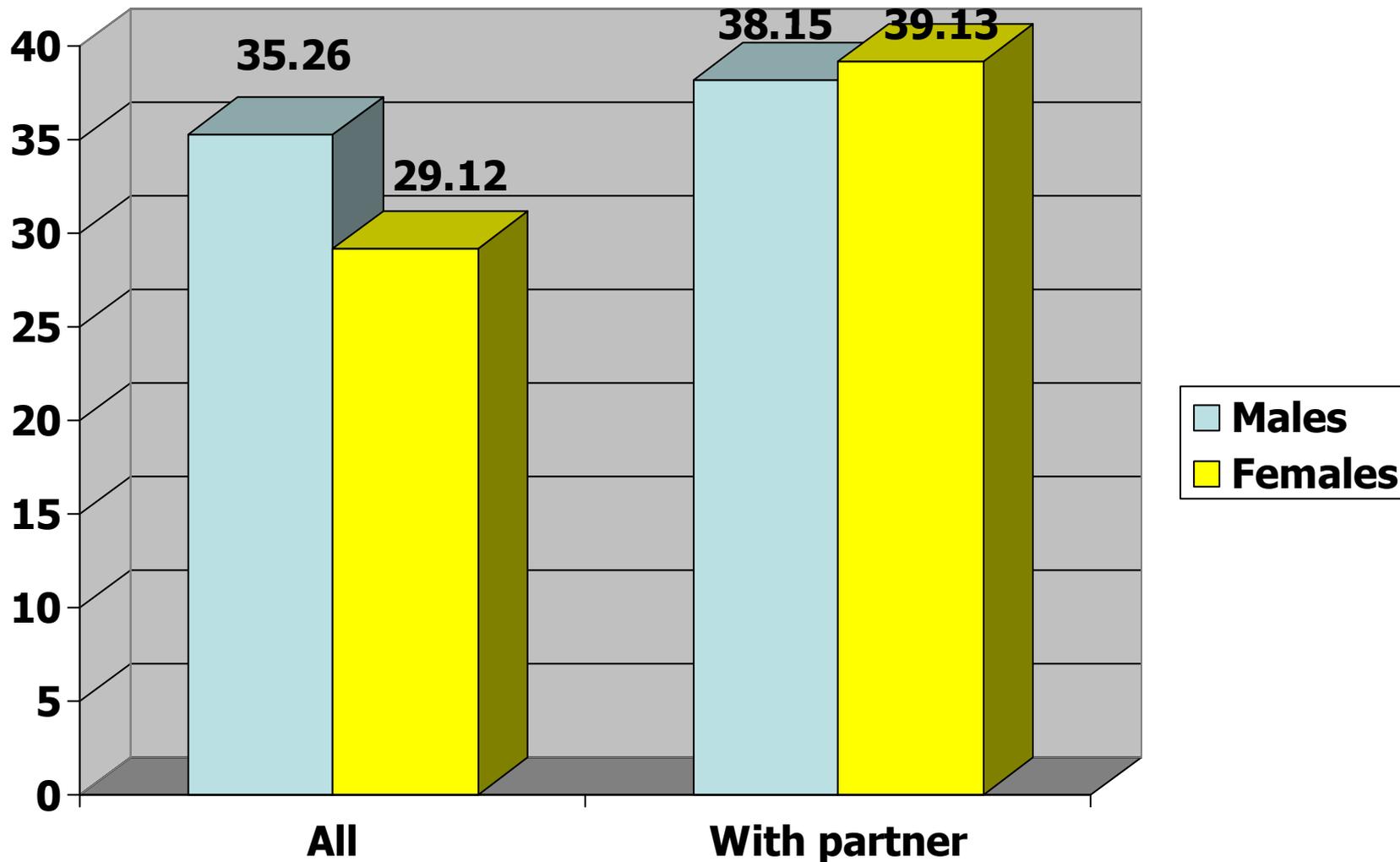## Men and women having intimate partner
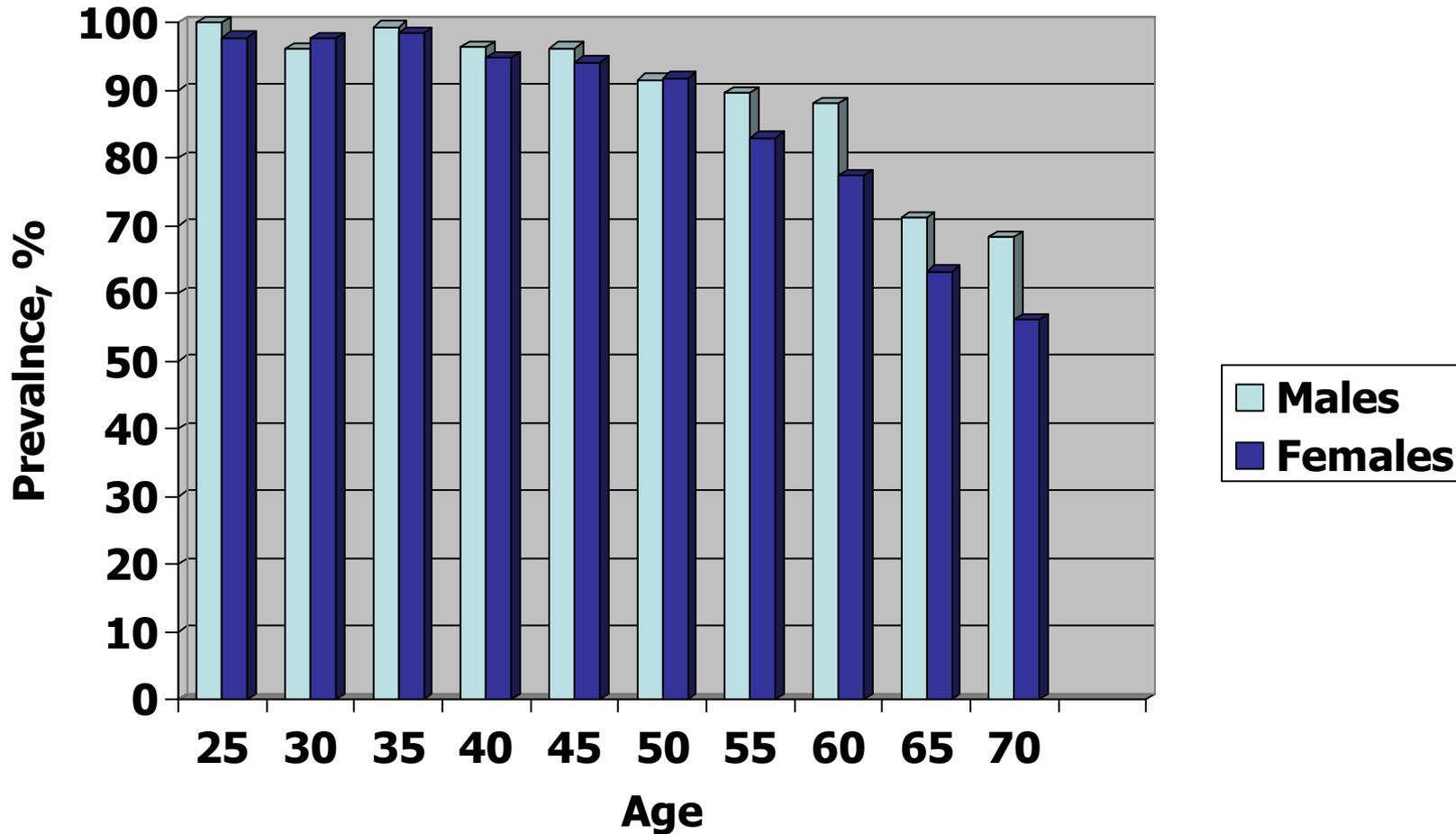
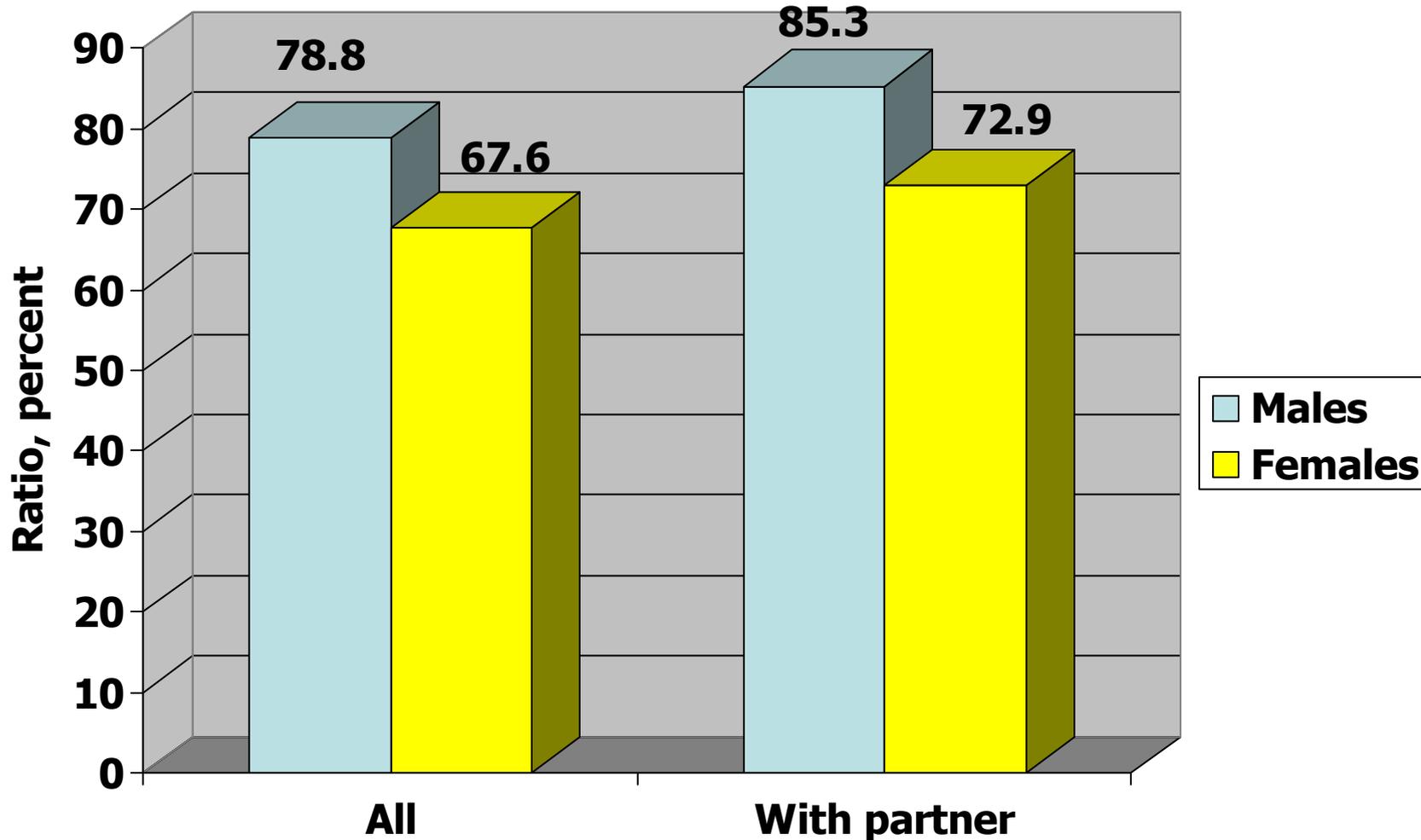# LE and SALE at Age 30 (MIDUS 1)

Sexually Active Life Expectancy at Age 30 (MIDUS 1)

Sex to Life Expectancy Ratio at Age 30, percent (MIDUS 1)

Bar chart showing Ratio, percent on the y-axis (0 to 90) for two categories "All" and "With partner", comparing Males and Females.

- All: Males 78.8, Females 67.6
- With partner: Males 85.3, Females 72.9

Legend: Males, Females

Comparison with other surveys

NSHAP - National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project, is an in-home survey of 3,000 persons aged 57 to 84 that collect biomarkers of health and physiological functioning to better characterize the health of survey participants. Rich source of data on sexuality at older ages.

Sexually Active Life Expectancy at Age 55

SALE, years

MIDUS-1: Males 15.55, Females 10.06

NSHAP: Males 14.77, Females 10.36
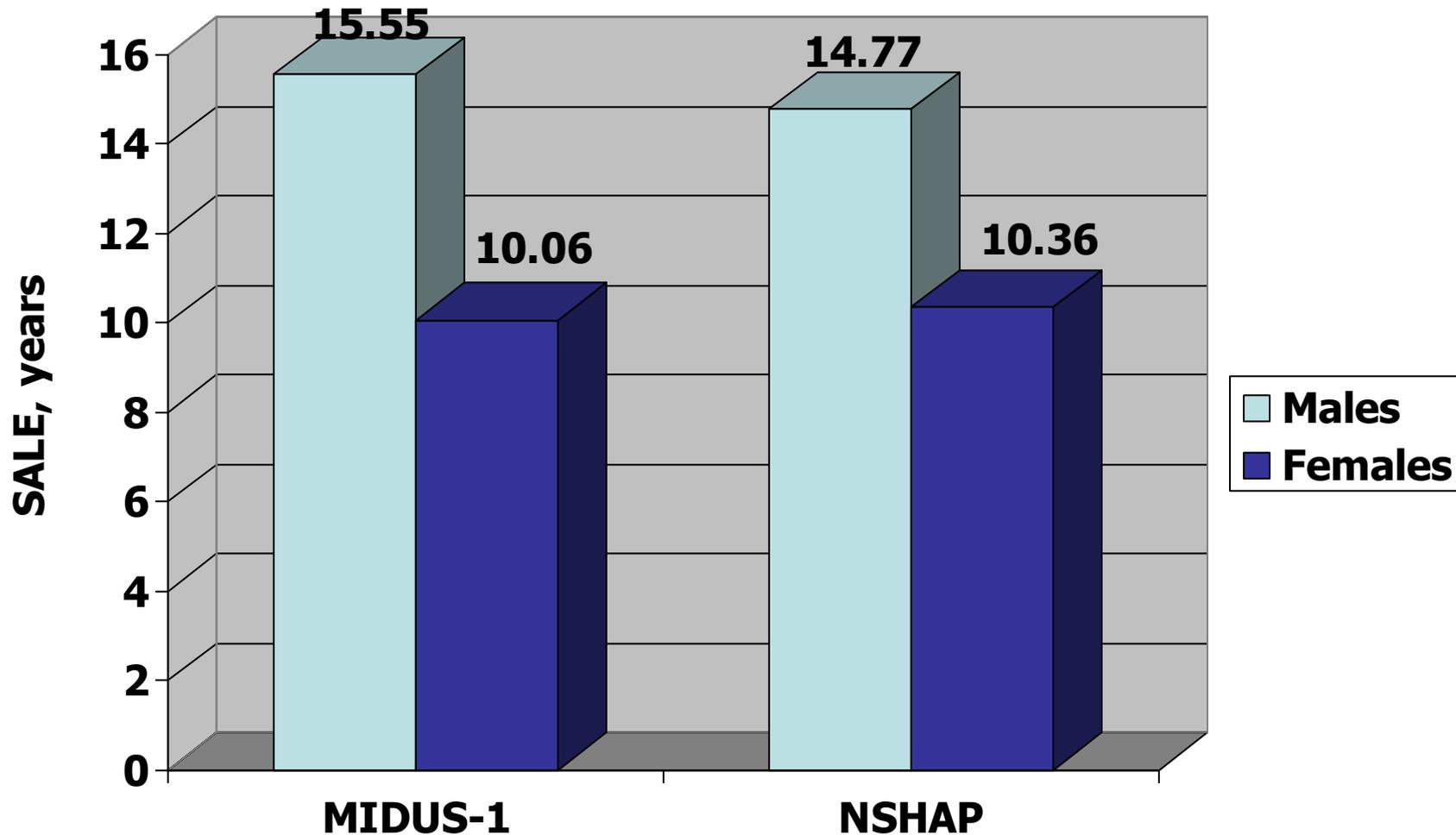
Sex to Life Expectancy Ratio at Age 55, percent
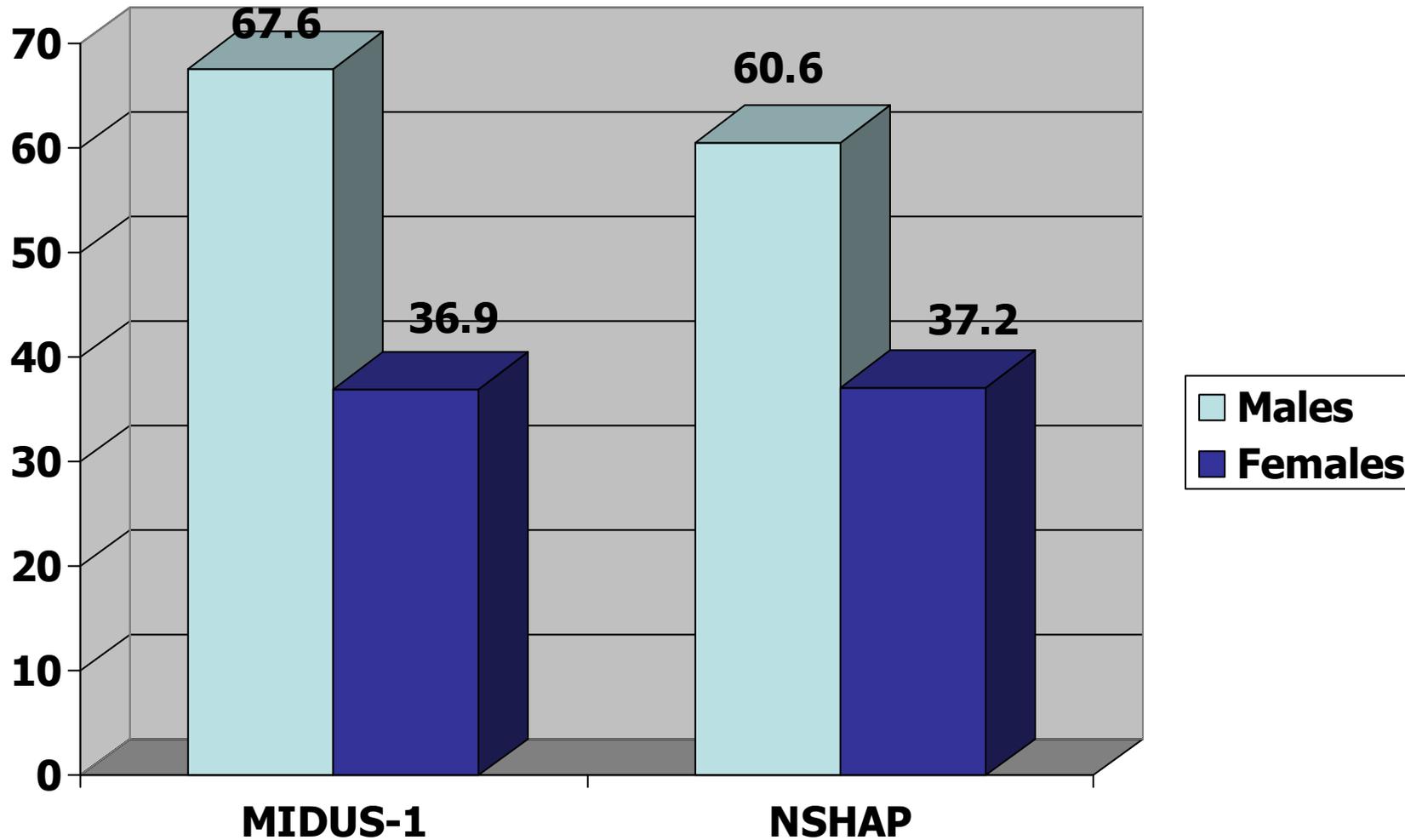
Conclusions

Women have lower sexually active life expectancy compared to men

Women and men having partner have similar sexually active life expectancy at age 30

However women have lower sex to life expectancy ratio compared to men regardless of partner status
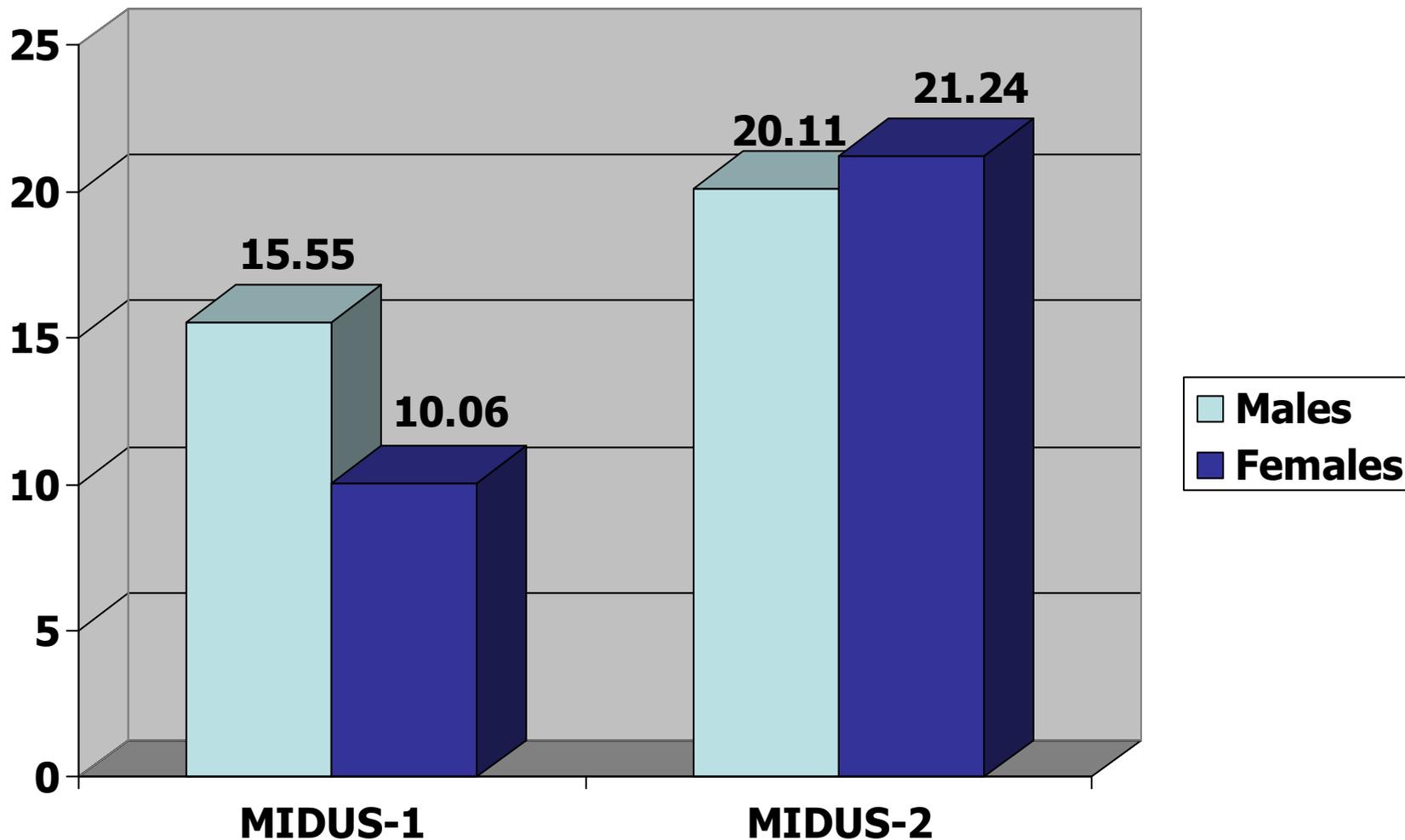
Limitations

Based on cross-sectional study

Based on self-reported information on health and sexuality

May be subjected to non-response bias

Sexually Active Life Expectancy at Age 55

Acknowledgments

THANK YOU!

Multivariate Models

- **Logistic regression model of the likelihood of having sex in the past six months, conditional on having a current marital or other romantic relationship.**

- **Linear regression model of the rating of sexual aspect of life , conditional on having a current marital or other romantic relationship.**

Results of logistic regression model
Dependent variable: having sex in the past 6 months

Covariate	Odds ratio	95% CI	P-value
Age (vs 25-54)			
55-64	**0.18**	(0.11-0.31)	<0.001
65-74	**0.06**	(0.04-0.12)	<0.001
Respondent's health (vs poor)			
Good health	0.72	(0.37-1.40)	0.334
Excellent health	1.13	(0.54-2.36)	0.748
Partner's health (vs poor)			
Good partner's health	**1.89**	(1.06-3.36)	0.030
Excellent partner's health	**2.14**	(1.22-3.75)	0.008

Education and race were not significantly associated with sex activity

Results of linear regression model

Dependent variable: 10-grade rating of the sex aspect of life

Covariate	Coefficient	95% CI	P-value
Age (vs 25-54)			
55-64	**-0.71**	**(-1.13 - -0.30)**	**<0.001**
65-74	**-1.71**	**(-2.32 - -1.11)**	**<0.001**
Respondent's self-rated health (vs poor)			
Good health	0.12	(-0.40-0.64)	0.641
Excellent health	0.47	(-0.04-0.98)	0.072
Partner's health (vs poor)			
Good health	**1.11**	**(0.60-1.61)**	**<0.001**
Excellent health	**1.87**	**(1.40-2.35)**	**<0.001**

African-Americans rated sex life significantly better than whites. Education NS

Other Results of the Multivariate Models

- HRT and obesity are negatively associated with both sexual activity and rating of the sexual aspect of life

- Self-rated emotional health is positively associated with the rating of the sexual aspect of life but not with the sexual activity