

Misclassification Bias: Diversity in Conceptualizations About Having 'Had Sex'.

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The researchers introduced the current report by stating their belief that it is the first study of a representative sample to assess attitudes about which behaviors constitute having "had sex" and to examine possible mediating factors (gender, age, giving/receiving stimulation; male ejaculation, female orgasm, condom use or brevity).

In Indiana, random-digit dialing was used to contact a final sample of 486 English-speaking residents (men=204; women=282). Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 96. The survey's questions assessed participants' attitudes about manual-genital (MG), oral-genital (OG), penile-vaginal intercourse (PVI), and penile-anal intercourse (PAI) behaviors.

"There was no universal consensus on which behaviors constituted having 'had sex,'" the authors wrote. One in five did not consider PAI as having had sex; three in 10 said OG did not constitute sex; and about half rated MG as sex. PVI with no male ejaculation was considered sex by 89.1 percent; PVI with no qualifier was judged to be sex by 94.8 percent (P less than 0.001). MG was endorsed more often when received (48.1 percent) than given (44.9 percent, P less than 0.001). Among male respondents, the youngest and oldest age groups were significantly less likely to believe certain acts constituted having "had sex."

"These findings highlight the need to use behavior-specific terminology in sexual history taking, sex research, sexual health promotion, and sex education," the authors concluded. "Researchers, educators, and medical practitioners should exercise caution and not assume that their own definitions of having 'had sex' are shared by their research participants or patients."