

8 February (The Guardian)

[The French sex recession: has la flamme really gone out? | Sex | The Guardian](#)

The French sex recession: has la flamme really gone out?

Reports suggest the French have lost their va-va-voom in the bedroom – and they certainly aren't the only ones

Wed 7 Feb 2024 18.21 CET



‘Non, je ne coucher pas avec toi, ce soir’ Photograph: SimonSkafar/Getty Images/iStockphoto

Name: The French sex recession.

Age: Nearly a decade in the making.

Appearance: Languid staring out of windows, plus the occasional French-inflected sigh.

Sounds sexy. Hmm.

What? Surely [France](#) is the home of romance? That’s not what I heard.

What did you hear? I heard that la flamme has gone out.

What does that mean? The French are not having sex.

Don’t be silly. They’re famously at it tout le temps, comme les couteaux. Not any more, apparently. According to [a new study](#), France is suffering from “an unprecedented decline” in sexual activity.

How steep is the decline? A cool 24% of French adults aged 18-69 said they had not had sex in the previous 12 months. In 2006 that figure was just 9%.

Ça alors! The decline is steeper still among the young: between the ages of 18 and 24 the proportion of celibates was 28%, up from 5% in 2006.

Why have they gone off it? According to the French Institute of Public Opinion (IFOP) – which conducted the poll from a sample of 1,911 people – it could just be a form of social correction. “What one generation does intensely, the next does less,” said François Kraus, IFOP’s director.

That’s no explanation. There’s also a suggestion that the French have escaped a cultural expectation to be sexually active. Women in particular now feel free to say non.

So it’s just a French thing? Also non. The number of cases of decreased sexual desire reported to the [Spanish National Health System](#) went up almost tenfold between 2011 and 2018. Other research has shown declines in [Germany](#) and [the Netherlands](#) in recent years.

Thank God for Brexit. The frequency of sex has also been [decreasing steadily](#) in the UK for decades.

Are there no benefits to leaving the EU? This is an international problem: [similar declines](#) have been reported in the US, Japan and Australia. It's probably due to increased stress, heavier workloads and the competing distractions of technology.

“Distractions of technology”: you mean pornography? “The internet provides new mediums of sexual experience that shift away from physical, partnered experiences,” the study says.

We're doomed. Then again, the recent figures could just be a reflection of a newfound willingness to be honest about these matters.

Is anyone still interested in sex? Italy tops the European tables for self-reported sex drive, according to the adult toy seller LoveHoney's "[LibidOlympics](#)" study.

If self-reporting was all there was to it, I'd come top. That's enough honesty.

Do say: “Now? Is it the first Friday of the month already?”

Don't say: “When in Rome ...”