Are bald men more virile than their well thatched contemporaries?

The suggestion that bald men are more virile than their well thatched contemporaries is probably an old wives’ tale, but it must be conceded that old wives are likely to be unusually authoritative in this matter. 

John Burton and colleagues were the first to examine the contentious view that an association exists between virility and baldness in 1979. Notably Burton himself was balding at this time. However, the hypothesis has never been directly tested. In Burton et al’s study of 48 men aged 35–64 years, surrogate markers of “masculinity” such as hair density on the trunk and limbs, serum testosterone levels, sebum secretion rate, sweat secretion rate, skin thickness, muscle thickness and bone thickness showed no relationship to baldness. Virility per se was not assessed. Factors suggestive of a possible association include the lack of balding among eunuchs and pseudohermaphrodites, indicating that testosterone and its biologically active metabolite dihydrotestosterone are prerequisites for common baldness. 

Oral antiandrogen therapy is not used to treat androgenetic alopecia in men, as it has a profound inhibitory effect on the male libido, evidenced by its use to deliberately reduce sex drive in the treatment of deviant sexual behaviour in men.

Methods

In order to resolve this vexing question, we used data from a study originally designed to examine risk factors for prostate cancer. This study was conducted in Australia between 1994 and 1997 in men below the age of 70 years, using in-person interviews and categorisation of baldness, with subsequent completion of a questionnaire by the participant. We analysed risk factors for baldness using unconditional logistic regression.

Results

There were 2836 men who took part in the original study. Information on

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<th>Examples of androgenetic alopecia patterns in men*</th>
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<td><img src="image1" alt="Pattern 1" /></td>
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* Categorised in this study as (l to r) “nil”, “receding only”, “vertex only” and “fully bald”.

Abstract

Objective: To test the popular assertion that bald men are more virile than their well thatched contemporaries

Design, participants and setting: Secondary analysis of data from a case–control study in a community setting between 1994 and 1997 among men below the age of 70 years, using in-person interviews and categorisation of baldness, with subsequent completion of a questionnaire by the participant. We analysed risk factors for baldness using unconditional logistic regression.

Main outcome measures: Baldness; history of ejaculations between the ages of 20 and 49 years; total number of sexual partners.

Results: There was no significant association between baldness and the frequency of ejaculations, but bald men were significantly less likely to have had more than four female sexual partners.

Conclusions: In the population studied, bald men appear to be no more virile than their well thatched contemporaries.
sexual function and sexual partners was available for 2205 men. We performed a secondary analysis of risk factors for baldness using unconditional logistic regression with baldness as the outcome and adjusting for age. As there were no differences in associations between baldness and virility in men with and without prostate cancer, we combined the data (Box 2).

No significant association was found between baldness (either limited to vertex balding at the crown or being fully bald) and the frequency of ejaculations between age 20 and 49 years (Box 2), but bald men were significantly less likely to have had more than four female sexual partners in their lifetime.

**Discussion**

For our null findings to be explained by selection bias, we would have to postulate that relatively fewer virile bald men than non-virile bald men participated. Given that virility was not mentioned in any of the study information, and that virile men are likely to be participatory, this seems unlikely. Similarly, for reporting bias to have explained the null finding, would require that the virile bald men underreported the frequency of their ejaculations and non-virile men overreported. At the time the study was conducted, the myth that bald men are more virile was widespread, so we think it more likely that all participants would err on the side of societal expectations and overreport.

In the population we studied, bald men appear to be no more virile than their well thatched contemporaries. On the contrary, they seem to have fewer conquests. Although old wives may not be as authoritative on this matter as was once thought, it may be that bald men have earned this plaudit by being more faithful to them.

**Acknowledgements:** The original research was funded by National Health and Medical Research Council Project Grant 450104: Markers of androgen action, genetic variations and prostate cancer risk.

**Competing interests:** No relevant disclosures.

**References:**


