

Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001

Bulletin number 5

May 2002

Sexual Health

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Commissioned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety



This is the fifth in a series of bulletins produced from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey 2001. The topics covered in the previous reports include; Top-line results, Mental health and wellbeing, Physical activity and Health and ill-health.

This bulletin presents some of the key findings relating to sexual health. The bulletin focuses on 7 main areas: Knowledge of sexual matters, first experience of sexual intercourse, contraception use, change in sexual lifestyle, last occasion of sexual intercourse, pregnancy and infertility.

The questions on sexual health were asked of

Knowledge of sexual matters

The 3 most common ways that respondents learned about sexual matters when they were growing up were: Friends of about my own age (53%), Lessons at school (47%), and From my mother (35%).

Respondents were asked from which source they learned the most. 32% of all adults aged 16-44 learned most from friends of about their own age, followed by 20% from lessons at school and 17% from their mother.

Age and sex

Women were over twice as likely as men to have learned most about sexual matters when they were growing up from a family member or other relative (32% and 13% respectively).

A higher proportion of men than women learned most from friends of about their own age (38% compared with 28%).

Men in the 35-44 age group were more likely to have learned most about sexual matters when they were growing up from friends of their own age (44%), while younger men in the 16-24 age group learned most from friends of about their own age (27%) and lessons at school (27%).

Women in the 35-44 age group were more likely to have learned most about sexual

2,116 adults aged 16-44 using a self-completion form.

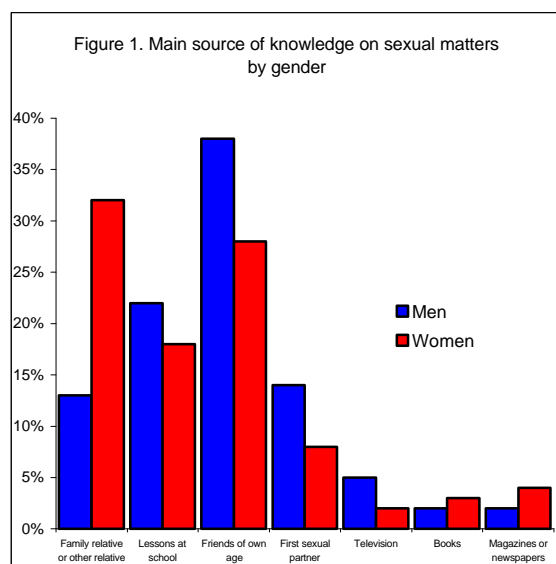
No causal inference is implied by the figures quoted in this bulletin as other explanatory factors such as age, social class, etc. need to be considered.

All differences quoted are statistically significant except where stated otherwise.

In addition to this bulletin, tables of all the key areas analysed by all the classificatory variables, along with the survey questions and a technical supplement are available on-line. Information on how to access these is provided at the end of this bulletin.

matters from a family member (30%). Younger women in the 16-24 age group also learned most from a family member (35%), with the respondent's mother cited as the main source of information amongst family members in both cases (23% and 29% respectively).

Younger women in the 16-24 age group were more likely to have learned most about sexual matters from a magazine or newspaper than older women in the 35-44 age group (8% and 3% respectively).



First experience of sexual intercourse

Half of the respondents had experienced sexual intercourse for the first time by the age of 17 among men and 18 among women.

Age and Sex

Men were more than twice as likely as women to have had sexual intercourse before they were sixteen (18% compared with 7%).

The majority of men (85%) and women (86%) had reported having sexual intercourse by the time they were twenty-six.

Young men aged 16-24 were almost twice as likely as young women to have had sexual intercourse by the age of sixteen, 20% compared with 11%.

Similar proportions of men in the different age groups said they had experienced sexual intercourse by the age of sixteen.

Overall, young adults in the 16-24 age group were almost twice as likely as older adults in the 35-44 age group to have reported having sexual intercourse before they were sixteen (15% compared with 8%).

11% of adults said that they had not experienced sexual intercourse at any point in their lives. Almost one third of adults aged 16-24 (31%) said they had not yet had sexual intercourse, compared with 3% of those aged 35-44.

Religion

Protestants were almost twice as likely as Catholics to have had sexual intercourse before they were sixteen (15% compared with 8%).

Socio-Economic Group (SEG)

Respondents from a partly skilled SEG background were twice as likely as those from a professional/ managerial background to have had sexual intercourse before the age of sixteen (14% and 7% respectively).

Highest Educational Qualification

Respondents with a GCSE A-C (or equivalent grades) as their highest educational qualification were more than twice as likely as those respondents educated to degree level to have had sexual intercourse before they were sixteen (15% and 7% respectively).

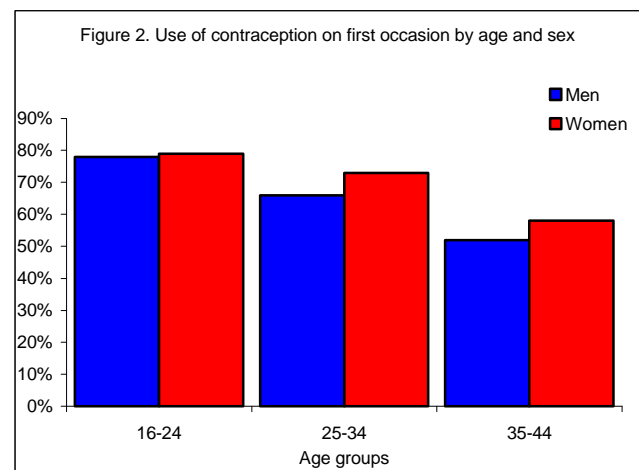
Use of Contraception on First Occasion

66% of respondents who reported having had sexual intercourse used some form of contraceptive on their first occasion.

Women were more likely than men to have used a contraceptive on their first occasion (68% and 63% respectively).

Approximately four-fifths (79%) of respondents in the 16-24 age group used a form of contraceptive on their first occasion compared with 70% of adults aged 25-34 and 55% of those aged 35-44.

The majority of adults (82%) who used a form of contraceptive on their first occasion used a condom (sheath/ duxex).



Contraception use

Respondents who had experienced sexual intercourse were asked which forms of contraceptive they, or their partner, had ever used.

The most commonly used contraceptive method was the pill (72%) followed by a condom/sheath (58%) and thirdly withdrawal/being careful (13%). 5% of respondents said that they had not used any form of contraception.

Respondents were asked which form of contraceptive they or their partner had used in the previous year. 40% of adults had used a condom/sheath and 38% the pill. 17% had not used any form of contraceptive in the previous twelve months.

Age and sex

The majority of men aged 16-24, or their partners, had used some form of contraceptive during the previous year

(87%). The contraceptive method most commonly used by these men (or their partners) was a condom/sheath (67%) followed by the pill (44%).

The most commonly used method of contraception amongst women aged 16-24 or their partners was the pill (56%) followed by a condom/sheath (52%). 8% of women in this age group had not used any form of contraceptive in the previous 12 months.

Overall, older respondents were more likely to have reported not using a form of contraceptive than younger respondents, possibly due to the higher numbers in the 35-44 age group trying to conceive.

Religion

A similar proportion of Catholics (19%) and Protestants (16%) reported that they had not used any form of contraceptive during the previous twelve months.

Change in sexual lifestyle

Age and sex

18% of men and 19% of women who reported having sexual intercourse had changed their sexual lifestyle, or made decisions about sex because of concern about catching AIDS or HIV.

Adults in the 16-24 age group were more than twice as likely as those in the 35-44 age group to have changed their sexual lifestyle because of concern about catching AIDS or HIV, (26% compared with 12%). This may relate to older adults being in more stable relationships.

Respondents who indicated that they had changed their sexual lifestyle were asked in which ways they had changed. Almost half (49%) had started using a condom, 43% had stayed with one partner and approximately one quarter (24%) had found out more about a person before having sexual intercourse.

Women were more than twice as likely as men to have avoided having sexual intercourse out of concern of catching AIDS or HIV (17% compared with 7%).

Attendance at Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) Clinic

7% of men and 5% of women who had experienced sexual intercourse had attended a Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinic at some point in their lives.

There was no significant difference between the number of adults who had attended a GUM clinic across different age groups.

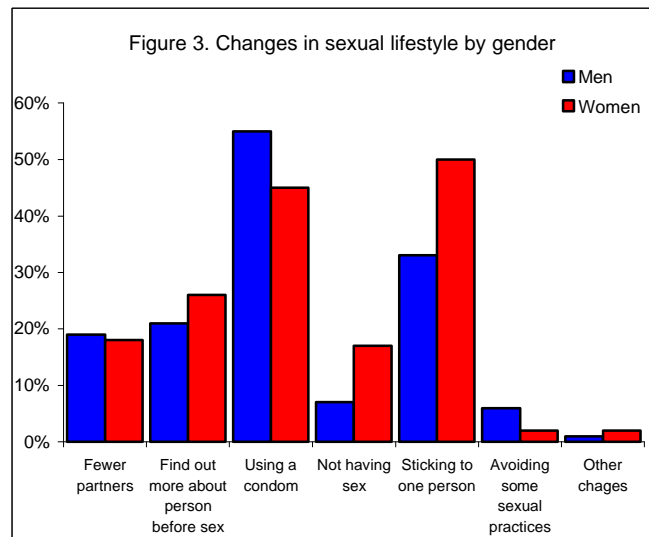
Time since last visit to GUM clinic

Almost half (47%) of respondents who had attended a

GUM clinic had done so longer than 5 years ago, compared with one-fifth who had attended a GUM clinic in the previous 12 months.

Change of attitude to sexual lifestyle

Respondents who had attended a GUM clinic were three times more likely to have changed their sexual lifestyle due to concern over AIDS or HIV than respondents who have not attended a GUM clinic (51% and 17% respectively).



Last occasion of sexual intercourse

Just over a half (53%) of all respondents who had experienced sexual intercourse said they last had sex in the previous seven days. Approximately three-quarters (76%) said they had sexual intercourse within the previous 4 weeks.

Age and sex

There was no significant difference between the proportion of men and women who had sexual intercourse in the previous seven days (55% and 52% respectively).

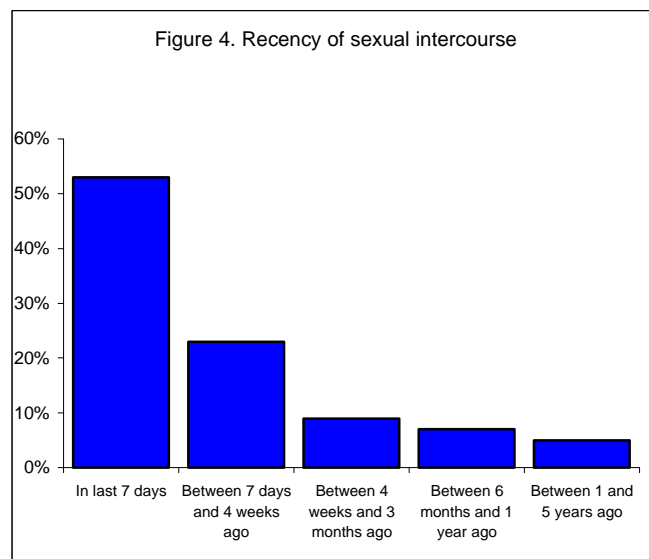
Just over a half of adults aged 35-44 (54%) and those aged 25-34 (57%) said they had sexual intercourse in the previous seven days compared to 43% of those aged 16-24.

Marital status

Respondents who were married and living with their husband/wife were more likely to have had sexual intercourse in the previous seven days (64%) than respondents who were divorced (44%), single (41%), married and separated from their partner (24%) or widowed (11%).

Overall, 15% of respondents said that the last time they had sexual intercourse was the first time with that partner.

Young adults in the 16-24 age group were more likely to have said this was the first time with that partner than older adults in the 35-44 age group (23% and 13% respectively). 61% of men and 51% of women said they had used a condom/ sheath on this occasion.



Pregnancy

13% of respondents, who had experienced sexual intercourse, said there had been a time in their lives, lasting six months or longer, when they and a partner had tried to conceive without success.

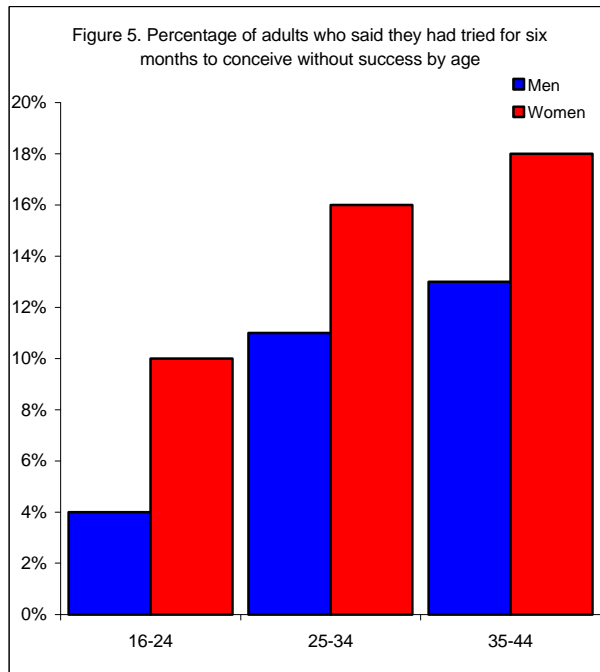
Age and sex

Older adults were more than twice as likely as younger adults to have reported trying to conceive for at least six months without any success, 16% of those aged 35-44 compared with 7% of those aged 16-24.

The largest difference between men and women occurred in the 16-24 age group where women were two and a half times more likely than men to have reported trying to conceive with their partner for at least six months without success (10% and 4% respectively).

Socio-economic group (SEG)

The proportion of respondents who said they had tried to conceive for at least six months without success did not differ by SEG. Approximately one-sixth of respondents in each SEG reported trying to conceive with their partner without success.



Infertility

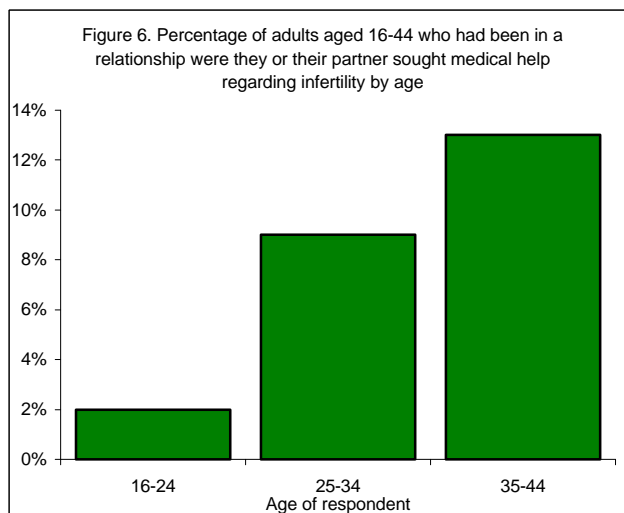
9% of respondents said that they or their partner had sought medical or professional help about infertility at some point in their lives.

Age and sex

Respondents in the 35-44 age group were more likely than respondents in the 16-24 age group to have reported being part of a relationship where they or their partner had sought medical or professional help regarding infertility (13% and 2% respectively).

Socio-economic group (SEG)

The proportion of respondents who were part of a relationship where they or their partner had sought medical or professional help about infertility did not differ by SEG. Approximately 10% of respondents in each SEG reported they or their partner had sought help regarding infertility.



For additional copies of this bulletin, the detailed tables and technical report, or previous bulletins in this series, please contact:

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