

CHANGING THE FUTURE

Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland



REPORT 4:
**SEXUAL HEALTH
& BEHAVIOUR**

unicef 

CHANGE THE FUTURE

UNICEF is a global organisation working in more than 190 countries to help build a world in which children's rights are respected, their needs are provided for and to ensure they have a voice in shaping the world around them. We believe in changing the world for children in Ireland too. UNICEF advocates for all young people to ensure that they have every opportunity to grow, develop and contribute to our society. We are working to ensure that young people in Ireland are heard and that their rights are realised.

This is why we believe the *Changing the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland* report series is vitally important – because it is founded exclusively on the views of young people. *Changing the Future* is about the voice of young people living in Ireland, telling us their story in their own words.

This Research Project was coordinated by UNICEF Ireland.

The research, data and findings reported in *Change the Future: Experiencing Youth in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour* was completed and compiled in December 2010. UNICEF would like to express our gratitude to our research partners MCCC, and The Base Ballyfermot. Further details of the methodology and background to the report are available through the offices of UNICEF Ireland: www.unicef.ie

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Photography: The photographs of young people used within this report for illustration are images posed by models and do not depict actual situations, or reflect the themes of the report.



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UNICEF Ireland is very proud to present this fourth and final report which concludes UNICEF Ireland's *Changing the Future* series.

The publication of this report series represents our effort to directly and openly engage young people living in Ireland upon the central themes and critical issues that they have identified as important in their daily lives.

This report addresses some of the most prominent themes that the young participants in this project identified as important in their lives – those of sexual health and behaviour.

What the findings suggest is that adolescent sexuality can be both a source of great happiness and of significant distress to young people. While there are clearly a wide variety of sources from which young people learn about sex, sexual health and sexual behaviour, there does not seem to be any real consistency in the way that young people engage these sources – the obvious exception being the way that they share experiences with one another.

Sex is not exclusively about risk, but there are risk factors – many of which have been identified by the young people who took part in the survey. Issues such as unplanned pregnancy; contraceptive use; drugs and alcohol; or peer pressure are just some of the recurring themes that emerged amongst our sample.

UNICEF Ireland strongly believes the most important, and often overlooked, way to discuss these difficult issues with young people is to find a way to do so on their terms. If young people themselves define the borders and language of the discussion they may be more likely to engage in it with commitment and honesty. If we create the space in which children and young people can talk openly and in their own language even upon challenging subjects such as sex, then we are likely to learn more from what they tell us.

If we can take part in conversations with young people in which we learn from them, then we are one step closer to creating the world that they deserve.

With young people themselves assuming their place in the discussion, together we can *Change the Future*.

UNICEF Ireland

SEXUAL HEALTH AND BEHAVIOUR

How did we do it?

Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour is the fourth and final report in UNICEF Ireland's *Changing the Future* series. The purpose of this report series is to present the results of primary research that UNICEF carried out at the end of 2010, and to collate the findings of that survey into a series of reports that present a single holistic snapshot of adolescent wellbeing in Ireland.

The first of these four reports – *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Happiness*, published in April 2011, has already outlined the methodology employed in this research in some detail.

For that reason, *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour* will only restate the broadest elements of that methodology:

- The research includes respondents from all four Provinces – Leinster, Munster, Ulster and Connaught;
- The results include male and female respondents;
- The research featured the responses of young people aged 16 to 20 years;
- The survey used youth-friendly language;
- All information gathered on the pages of the survey website remains confidential;
- No information gathered will be shared with any other party;
- No IP addresses or other technical information was captured by our software or within the research;
- No contact information that could identify any respondent for this survey - including emails, phone numbers, pictures, videos, sound files or names and addresses or other information was gathered by this research;

- The only demographic information gathered was: age, sex and county of residence. This is not considered sufficient to identify the location or identity of any respondent and ensures that respondents can give full and frank replies to questions without any worry of being identified at a later date by any individual, group or body;
- Questions were both prompted and unprompted, allowing for both qualitative and quantitative results to emerge from the data collected;
- The survey asked the participants to tell us 'in their own words' as often as possible;
- Throughout this Report, we have presented those responses exactly as they were told to us by the young people themselves.

Further details of the conceptual framework and methodology employed in this research project can be gained from the series' first report *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Happiness*, or by contacting the offices of UNICEF Ireland.

As the fourth and final report, *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour* this report concludes UNICEF Ireland's *Changing the Future* series.

Copies of the other three reports are available through the offices of UNICEF Ireland.

What did we find?

The *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland* report series has given the young respondents the opportunity to paint a broad snapshot of their lives by discussing some of the most prevalent issues that young people living in Ireland today face. It is perhaps unsurprising that the young respondents identified sexual health and behaviour as one of the most significant issues.

As UNICEF Ireland found in discussing some of the other issues that the series has explored, answering questions about sex is not something that young people do lightly. Sexuality and sexual behaviour can be deeply personal and private experiences, not easily discussed in public arenas.

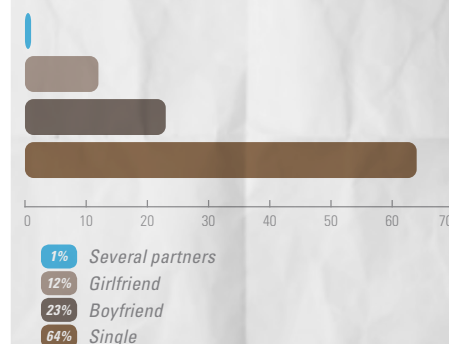
While questions around these experiences are not easy to answer, learning about the ways that young people view sex is very important, particularly if we are to learn how to provide the necessary information, supports and advice to young people as they grow into responsible, healthy adults.

The young people who took part in *Changing the Future* were honest and forthright in revealing their insights upon these highly sensitive themes. UNICEF Ireland believes that their courage and honesty should be noted and commended.

Relationships amongst the Respondents

Changing the Future asked the respondents to describe their relationship status and to indicate the terms that they believed most accurately described their situation. Just over two thirds (64%) of the respondents aged sixteen to twenty reported their situation as 'single'.

What best describes your situation at the moment?



64% or respondents described their situation as "single", while just 1% reported that they had "several partners".

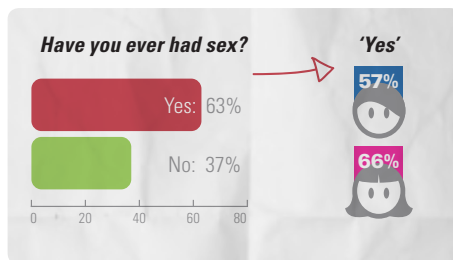
"Thankfully, I have found a loving relationship with someone."

More than 3 in 5 respondents described themselves as single, 1 in 5 reported that they have a boyfriend while 1 in 10 reported that they have a girlfriend. Only a small proportion – 1% reported that they have several partners.

PREVALENCE OF SEX

Reporting of Sex

Changing the Future asked the young respondents if they had ever had sex. 63% of all respondents reported that they had, while just over one third of the respondents reported that they had not ever had sex. There was a slight difference in terms of gender in that 66% of female respondents reported that they have had sex compared to only 57% of male respondents.



"Sex is good. People will have sex no matter what. Don't try to prevent sex from happening. Instead educate people about sex. Make sure they have safe sex."

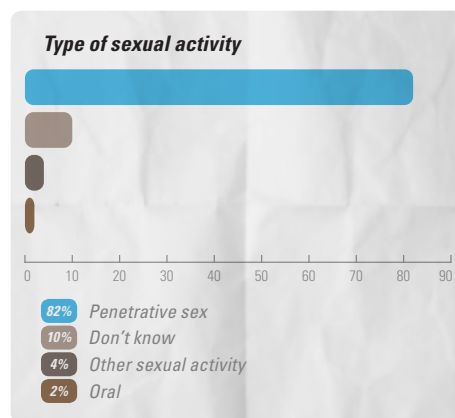
There were also differences in the reporting of sex based upon the ages of the respondents, with the proportion responding that they have had sex increasing steadily in line with age. 20% of sixteen year old respondents reported that they have had sex, growing to 83% of twenty year old respondents.

1 in 5 sixteen year old respondents reported that they have had sex, while 4 in 5 twenty year old respondents reported the same.

Age	%
16	20
17	51
18	62
19	75
20	83

'Types of Sexual Activity

Changing the Future asked the 63% of respondents who reported that they were sexually active to elaborate on the precise nature of that sexual activity and experience.



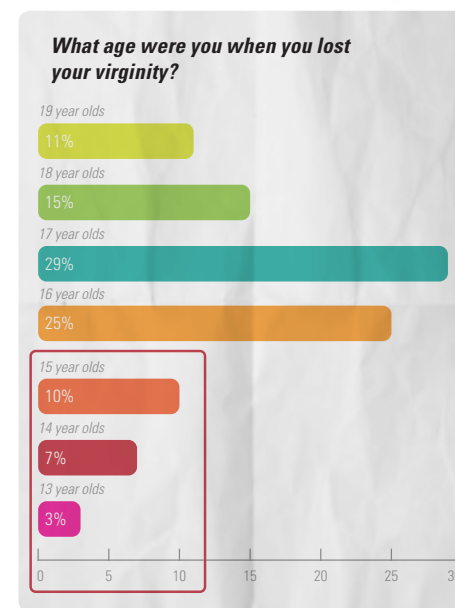
82% of those who were sexually active reported that they had engaged in 'full penetrative sex', 4% reported 'other sexual activity', 2% reported 'oral' sexual activity while a further 10% reported that they 'did not know'.

"My first sexual experience was with a male but I didn't lose my virginity to him, it was just foreplay."

82% of the young respondents who reported that they were sexually active described that activity as full penetrative sex.

Age of First Sexual Activity

With nearly 2 in 3 respondents reporting that they had engaged in sexual activity Changing the Future asked those who were sexually active to tell us at what age they had lost their virginity.

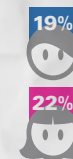


While the majority of respondents reported that they lost their virginity at sixteen years of age or older, a significant proportion reported that they had engaged in sex before sixteen years of age.

20% of those respondents who reported that they had sex, reported that they had lost their virginity before they were sixteen years old.

'Lost virginity' at 13 -15 years old:

Region	%
Dublin	28
Rest of Leinster	10
Munster	25
Connaught	16
Ulster	0



"I wish I had waited for the right guy."

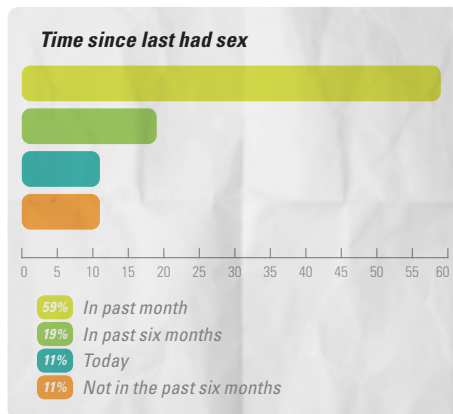
"Was happy but kinda wish it wasn't on a one night stand situation."

A slightly higher proportion of those who lost their virginity before they were sixteen years old were girls, while regionally the greatest proportion of respondents who reported that they had lost their virginity before they were sixteen came from Dublin, followed by Munster.

FREQUENCY OF SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Most Recent Sexual Activity

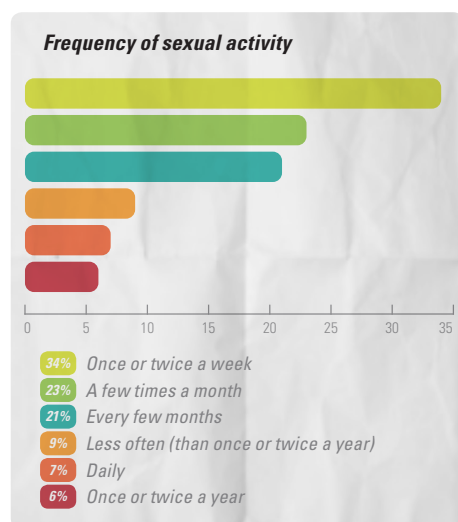
Amongst that proportion that reported themselves as sexually active nearly 3 in 5 (59%) reported that they had engaged in sexual activity in the past month, while 1 in 10 (11%) reported that they had engaged in sex the day they completed the survey.



59% of respondents reported to have had sex within the past month, 19% in the past six months. 11% reported to have had sex that day, while another 11% reported that they had not had sex in the past 6 months.

Frequency of Sexual Activity

UNICEF Ireland also asked the sample from *Changing the Future* who reported that they were engaged in sexual activity to reveal the frequency of that sexual activity.

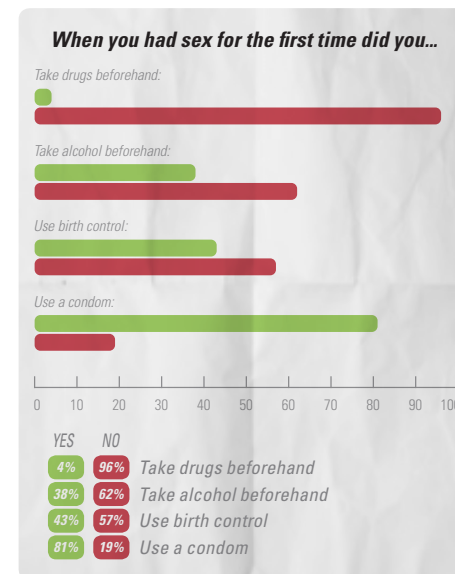


Approximately 1 in 3 of the respondents who were sexually active reported that they engaged in sexual activity once or twice a week, while 1 in 5 had sex a few times a month. A comparably small proportion of respondents (7%) reported that they had sex daily.

1 in 3 respondents reported that they had sex once or twice a week, while 1 in 5 reported sex a few times a month. 7% of respondents reported that they had sex every day.

Sexual Activity and Risk

Changing the Future asked the respondents to relate their first sexual experience to a number of other factors that can be associated with sexual behaviour such as the use of condoms, use of birth control and/or the consumption of alcohol or other drugs.



"Not everyone has sex irresponsibly."

"Make anti pregnancy pills easily accessible if they are safe to use."

The majority of respondents reported that they had used a condom during their first sexual experience, however 19% reported that they did not use a condom the first time that they had sex.

While only a small proportion (4%) reported that they used drugs the first time they had sex, a much greater proportion (38%) reported that they had consumed alcohol before having sex for the first time.

'Consumed alcohol prior to first sexual experience'

In our sample, 2 in 5 girls who were sexually active reported that they had consumed alcohol before their first sexual experience, compared to 3 in 10 boys.



While the majority of young respondents who reported that they were sexually active also reported that they did use a condom during their first sexual experience, a significant minority reported that they did not use a condom.

'Did not use a condom when you had sex for the first time'

22% of sexually active boys reported that they did not use a condom the first time they had sex compared to 18% of sexually active girls.



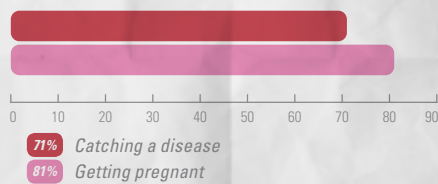
RISK BEHAVIOURS

1 in 5 sexually active respondents reported that they did not use a condom the first time that they had sex.

Decision Making and Condom Use

Changing the Future asked the respondents who had used a condom the first time that they had sex to elaborate on the reasons that they chose to do so and, specifically, what concerns led them to use a condom.

Concerns about not using a condom



"(I like) the idea for boys and girls to be able to buy condoms be made easier and non-embarrassing - as the way they are set in supermarkets suggests underage when at 16 and 17 it is always important to make safety a priority."

Within that part of the sample that had used a condom the first time that they had sex, 81% reported their concern as 'getting pregnant', while only 71% reported the concern of 'catching a disease'.

The respondents who did use a condom the first time they had sex were more concerned by "getting pregnant" than by "catching a disease".

Reflecting on First Sexual Experience

The degree of risk-taking is, of course, not the only significant factor associated with adolescents' first sexual experiences. *Changing the Future* also asked the young respondents to relate other perspectives upon their first sexual experience through the survey.

When asked if they were happy with their first sexual experience, the overwhelming majority of respondents (nearly 2 thirds of all respondents who were sexually active) reported that they were happy.

Happy with first sexual experience?



"I did it because I had the opportunity and thought I could use the experience."

"Obviously it wasn't too comfortable but no regrets about it."

15% reported that they wished they had waited until they were older, 12% reported that they 'wished it had not happened at all' and 7% reported that 'It was a disaster. I was very unhappy'.

Whilst the majority (63%) of sexually active respondents reported that they were happy with their first sexual experience, 1 in 4 reported that it "was not much fun", with a further 7% reporting it as a very unhappy experience.

Amongst the proportion who reported their first sexual experience in positive terms, there was a clear distinction between gender with a greater proportion of boys reflecting positively on the experience than girls.

'Yes I was happy'

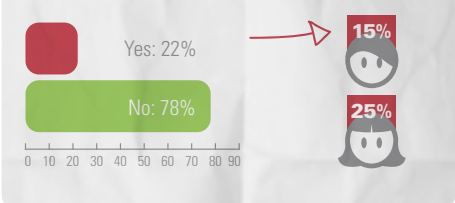
20% more boys than girls reported that they were happy with their first sexual experience.



Experience of Pressure during First Sexual Experience

As well as reporting different levels of happiness or dissatisfaction with first sexual experiences, some of the respondents also reported feeling under pressure to have sex the first time, these pressures also seemed more pronounced amongst girls rather than boys.

Felt under pressure to have sex?



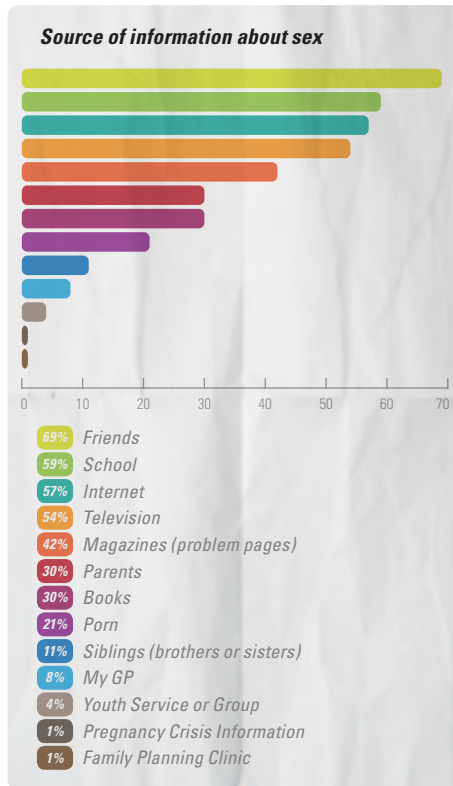
1 in 5 respondents who were sexually active reported that they felt under pressure to have sex the first time. 25% of sexually active girls reported that they had experienced such pressure, compared to just 15% of boys.

While 78% of sexually active respondents reported that they did not feel under pressure to have sex the first time, 22% reported that they did feel under pressure to do so.

INFORMATION ABOUT SEX

Information about Sex

There are now a wide range of potential sources of information available to young people on sexual health and behaviour, so *Changing the Future* also asked the young respondents to identify the most significant sources from which they receive information about sex.



"Young people really need more education on this topic I still feel pain and regret years later from mistakes I made."

The source of information identified most frequently by the respondents was that of those respondents' friends, with more than two thirds citing this source. 'School' (59%), the 'internet' (57%) and 'television' (54%) were all identified as the next most frequently reported sources of information regarding sex within the sample.

Just over 4 in 10 respondents identified magazines as a source of information about sex, while 3 in 10 identified books – roughly the same proportion (30%) that identified their parents as a source of information about sex.

69% of respondents identified friends as a source of information about sex, compared to 59% who identified school and 30% who reported their parents as a source of information about sex.

"From friends slagging each other in songs, jokes etc."

"Mostly from people in school talking about diseases and stuff."

"Through friends as we did not have any sexual health education until we where 18 years old in 6th year of school!!!"

Only small proportions indicated that they received information from services such as 'General Practitioners' (8%), 'Youth Service Groups' (4%), 'Pregnancy Crisis Information' (1%) or 'Family Planning Clinics' (1%).

However 1 in 5 (21%) respondents reported that they received information about sex from pornography.

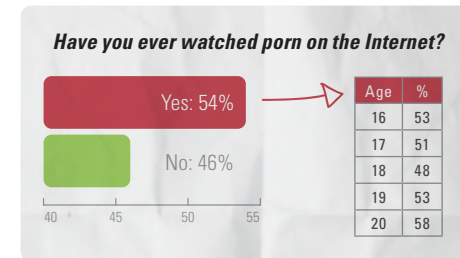
'Receive information about sex from pornography'

1 in 5 of all respondents, and a greater proportion of males than females, identified pornography as a source of information about sex.

37% (Male)
11% (Female)

"College and the Internet."

Although only 1 in 5 of the total sample indicated that they received information about sex from pornography, a much higher proportion reported that they had watched pornography on the internet. 54% of all respondents indicated that they had watched pornography on the internet.



The majority of sixteen year old respondents (53%) reported that they had watched pornography on the internet.

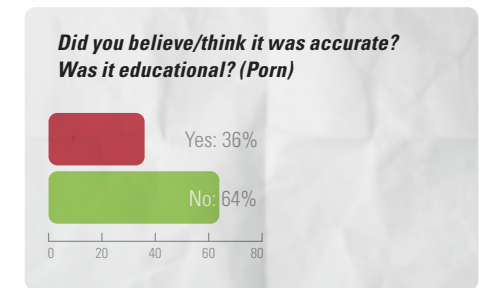
While the overall majority of respondents reported that they had watched pornography on the internet, there was a clear distinction between the two genders, with a much greater proportion of boys reporting that they had watched pornography on the internet.

'Watched pornography on the Internet'

Nearly 4 out of 5 male respondents (78%) had watched pornography on the internet, compared to 2 in 5 (40%) of female respondents.

78% (Male)
40% (Female)

Although most respondents had watched pornography on the internet, it was only a minority (albeit a significant 36%) that believed what they had seen was accurate or educational.



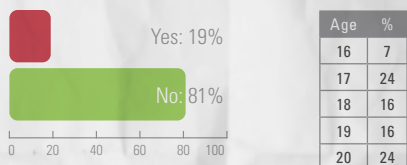
More than one third of the respondents who had watched pornography on the internet believed that it was accurate or educational.

TALKING TO PARENTS ABOUT SEX

Talking to Parents about Sex

The vast majority (81%) of respondents reported that they did not ever speak to their parents about sex. In fact, just 7% of sixteen year old respondents reported that they ever speak to their parents about sex.

Do you ever speak to your parents about sex?



Age	%
16	7
17	24
18	16
19	16
20	24

Only 1 in 5 respondents reported that they ever speak to their parents about sex.

"My parents were extremely strict being from strict old school backgrounds themselves and they never talked to me once about sex until after I became pregnant and that was only to tell me that I was stupid for getting pregnant."

Amongst the small proportion whose parents had spoken to them about sex, there was a higher proportion of female respondents, rather than male.

'Yes, my parents have spoken to me about sex'

Female respondents' parents were more likely to have spoken to them about sex.



"Am actually physically disgusted with the idea of talking about sex with my parents."

The respondents reported that their parents addressed a wide range of expectations and opinions related to sexual health and behaviour when these themes were raised in discussion. *Changing the Future* asked which of these concerns the young respondents had taken into account before having sex.

What parental expectations/opinions did you take into account?



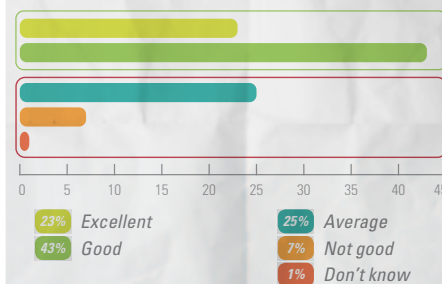
"My parents wished I should have sex for first time at an older age."

The most cited parental expectation/opinion that the respondents took into account was "taking precautions with condoms" (57%), this was followed by "not getting pregnant" (48%), "finding the right person" (44%) and not catching a disease (42%).

Understanding Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD's)

As we have already seen in *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour*, the majority of young respondents who reported the use of condoms during their first sexual experience cited concerns over pregnancy, rather than sexually transmitted diseases, as the principal reason. UNICEF asked the survey respondents to rate their own understanding of STD's.

How do you rate your understanding of sexually transmitted diseases?



66% of respondents rated their understanding of STD's as "Excellent" or "Good". The remaining 33% rated their understanding as "Average", "Not Good" or unknown.

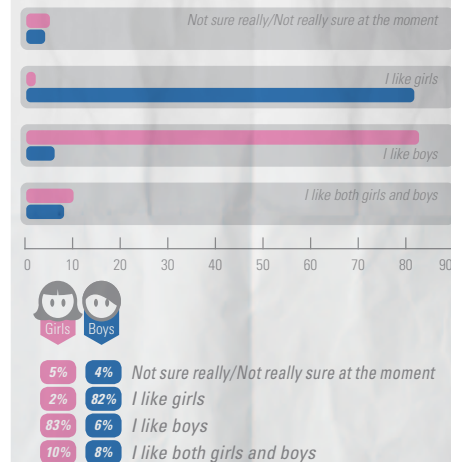
"Small course on STD's in our religion class in 6th year. Our teacher was ancient and not in touch with the times. Very embarrassing and very awkward. Would have been better if there was someone who was more our age that had a good and healthy attitude towards sex."

While the majority (66%) of respondents rated their understanding of STD's as 'excellent' or 'good', a significant proportion (33%) reported their understanding as 'average', 'not good' or 'unknown'.

Sexuality and Sexual Orientation

Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Sexual Health and Behaviour finally asked the respondents to indicate their interest in both boys and girls.

Which would you say best describes your interest in boys and girls?



SEXUAL ORIENTATION

SUMMARY

83% of female respondents reported that they liked boys while 82% of boys reported that they liked girls. 2% of girls and 6% of boys reported same sex attraction. 10% of girls and 8% of boys from our sample reported that they liked both boys and girls. Approximately 5% reported that they were unsure.

More than 4 in 5 boys and girls reported that they liked the opposite sex. 2% of female respondents and 6% of male respondents reported same sex attraction, while 8% of boys and 10% of girls reported that they liked both boys and girls.

The Effects of Sexuality upon other Relationships

While the majority (88%) of respondents indicated that their sexual orientation does not affect how they get on with family and friends, 12% of respondents indicated that their sexual orientation did affect those relationships.

Does your orientation affect how you get on with your friends and family?



12% of respondents reported that their sexual orientation affected how they got on with friends and family. 18% of male respondents reported this compared to 9% of female respondents.

Age	%
16	16
17	14
18	10
19	12
20	11

While 18% of male respondents reported that their sexual orientation affected how they got on with friends and family, only 9% of female respondents reported the same. There were also distinctions in terms of age in which 16% of sixteen year olds reported that their sexual orientation affected relationships with family and friends, compared to just 11% of twenty year olds.

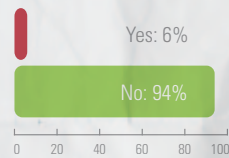
"I'm afraid to admit that I've never had a boyfriend because I fear that people will judge me harshly because of it."

Sexual Orientation and Bullying

Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Happiness already explored the prevalence of bullying amongst young people living in Ireland, and 55% of the respondents to UNICEF's survey reported that they had been bullied.

However, *Changing the Future* also asked the young respondents to tell us if the bullying that they experienced was related to their sexual orientation.

Have you been bullied because of your sexual orientation?



6% of the respondents reported that they had been bullied because of their sexual orientation.

Only a small minority of the total sample, 6% of our respondents reported that they had been bullied as a result of their sexual orientation.

Concluding Summary:

What are young people telling us?

Across the entire *Changing the Future* report series, UNICEF Ireland has asked the young participants to reflect upon their own experiences and opinions of the themes and issues that they believe to be central aspects of adolescence in Ireland.

In this final report, the respondents have painted a lucid and informative picture of adolescent perspectives on sexuality, sexual health and sexual behaviour. While the findings reported represent the experiences of the participants themselves, they may also be seen as illustrative of wider attitudes and behaviours regarding adolescent sexuality in Ireland.

However, UNICEF Ireland also believes that it is crucial to place the findings presented herewith within the context of the individual experiences from which they are drawn. Sexuality and sexual behaviour are deeply personal themes, experienced in different ways by all adolescents.

The young participants who took part in UNICEF's *Changing the Future* have not only fulfilled their right to participate in the public discourses that affect their lives, but have chosen to reflect upon their own perspectives in the effort to deepen our understanding of the lives of all young people living in Ireland.

Although the majority of the respondents (64%) described their situation as single, a significant proportion responded that they were in a relationship. In *Changing the Future: Experiencing Adolescence in Contemporary Ireland: Happiness* the most cited source of happiness for young people was the interpersonal relationships that they form, so it should come as no surprise that such a significant proportion (36%) reported that they were in relationships of one kind or another.

It is also evident within the *Changing the Future* sample that being in a relationship is not necessarily a prerequisite for sexual activity, with a much larger proportion of young respondents reporting that they have had sex than are in a relationship. 63% of the respondents, and a higher proportion of female respondents than male, reported that they had already had sex by the time that they took part in the survey.

There was also a marked increase in the proportion of sexually active respondents as age increased. While 83% of twenty year old respondents reported that they were sexually active, just 20% of sixteen year olds reported that they were sexually active.

A significant proportion of the sexually active respondents reported that they lost their virginity before they reached the age of sixteen years. 20% of sexually active respondents reported that they lost their virginity before turning sixteen, with 1 in 10 respondents reporting that they first had sex when they were thirteen or fourteen years old. The young respondents also distinguished between different types of sexual activity, with 82% reporting that they had engaged in 'full penetrative sex', 4% reporting 'other sexual activity' and 2% reporting 'oral' sexual activity.

1 in 3 sexually active respondents reported that they had sex once or twice a week, compared to 1 in 5 who had sex a few times a month. A comparably small proportion, just 7%, reported that they had sex every day.

It is clear that the majority of young respondents are sexually active, but that the nature and frequency of that sexual activity varied greatly.

SUMMARY

When asked about the first time they had sex 4% reported that they had taken drugs and 38% reported that they had consumed alcohol. There was a significantly higher proportion of female respondents that reported the consumption of alcohol prior to their first sexual experience, in fact more than 2 out of 5 sexually active female respondents reported the consumption of alcohol.

Although the vast majority (81%) of respondents reported that they used a condom the first time that they had sex, there remained 19%, or nearly 1 in 5, sexually active respondents who reported that they did not use a condom the first time that they had sex.

UNICEF Ireland wanted to learn more about the various considerations that young people take into account in their decision making process around condom use. The most cited reason that the young respondents gave as to their concerns about not using a condom was 'getting pregnant' and this was followed by 'catching a disease' suggesting that in our sample the young participants were more concerned by unplanned pregnancies rather than the risk of contracting STD's.

Overall 63% of the sexually active respondents to UNICEF's *Changing the Future* survey reported that they were happy with their first sexual experience, but there was a clear distinction between the two genders in this regard. While 75% of male respondents were happy with their first sexual experience, this proportion dropped to just 55% of female respondents.

More than 1 in 5 respondents reported that that they felt under pressure to have sex the first time and a higher proportion of females (25%) compared to males (15%) reported experiencing pressure of this kind.

The young respondents identified a myriad of sources of information about sexual health and behaviour which reflect the many media, agencies and individuals which disseminate such information in Ireland today. The most cited source of information about sex was 'friends' with 7 in 10 respondents reporting this. Other notable sources were school (59%) and parents (30%). Relatively small proportions identified service providers such as 'General Practitioners' (8%), 'Youth Service Groups' (4%) or 'Family Planning Clinics' (1%).

54% of all respondents reported that they had watched pornography on the Internet and a significant proportion (36%) believed that the pornography that they saw was accurate and/or educational. 1 in 5 of all respondents reported that they received information about sex from pornography. Once again there was a clear gender distinction within the *Changing the Future* sample, where greater proportions of male respondents reported that they had watched pornography on the internet, identified pornography as a source of information about sex and believed the pornography that they had seen to be accurate and/or educational.

Only 1 in 5, and only 7% of sixteen year old respondents, reported that they ever speak to their parents about sex. 23% of female respondents reported that they had spoken to their parents about sex, compared to just 13% of male respondents. The most cited topic which was discussed with parents was reported as 'taking precautions with condoms' (57%), followed by 'not getting pregnant' (48%), 'finding the right person' (44%) and 'not catching a disease' (42%).

Most young respondents (66%) rated their understanding of STD's as 'excellent' or 'good', but a significant minority amounting to just under 34% of the total sample rated their understanding as 'average' or 'not good'.

While the majority of the respondents reported that they were attracted to the opposite sex, significant proportions reported same sex attraction.

1 in 10 respondents reported that their sexual orientation affects how they get on with friends and family, with 6% reporting that they have been bullied because of their sexual orientation.

The young people who chose to tell UNICEF Ireland about their experiences of, and perspectives on, sexual health and behaviour were very frank about what can be a private topic. The *Changing the Future* sample suggests that while sexual activity is prevalent amongst young people in Ireland, young people's satisfaction with their sexual experiences is very varied. The respondents to *Changing the Future* have also highlighted the broad spectrum from which young people living in Ireland draw down information about sex – ranging from friends and family, to family planning services to internet based pornography.

It is clear that the young respondents are concerned by STD's, but that concern is less pronounced than concerns over unplanned pregnancy. The respondents report that these concerns have led them to make decisions about safe sex, however there is a significant proportion who did not use condoms the first time that they had sex. There are also other significant risk behaviours which the young respondents have reported, such as the consumption of alcohol and drugs.

If the respondents to *Changing the Future* do reflect broader adolescent trends, attitudes and behaviours towards sex, then it is clear that young people in Ireland do not identify with one specific source of support and information, other than their own peers.

UNICEF Ireland suggests that we must be sure that when a young person is making decisions about their sexual health and behaviour every opportunity is afforded them in terms of open discussion, understanding, support, information and advice.

If we are to respond to the types of challenges laid out in this survey, we must learn to listen to individual perspectives, and be available to respond to individuals' needs.

Also available in the 'Changing the Future' series:



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