

Men in Northern Ireland: Report 8 June 2012

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This factsheet was produced to inform Men's Health Week:

www.mhfi.org

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Young men and sexual health

Key facts

- Young men found it easier to talk about sex to their girlfriend/boyfriend and close friends, than to their parents.
- Most 16 year olds got information about sex at school (88%), and 45% said that this was their most helpful source of information about sexual matters.
- 23% of 16 year olds said that they had had sex.
- 24% of those in Year 8, but 80% of those in Year 12, said they would find it easy to get contraceptives.
- Knowledge of some sexually-transmitted diseases was high among 11-16 year old boys, although some diseases were less well-known.
- The number of diagnoses of some diseases (such as chlamydia and gonorrhoea) is higher for males than for females. Infection rates are particularly high for those aged 20-24.

Introduction

In 2008, a Sexual Health Strategy and Plan 2008-2013 was published by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS). That document highlighted levels of sexual health and experience within Northern Ireland, in particular, the high levels of teenage pregnancy and increasing numbers of sexually-transmitted infections (STIs). Young people were shown to be especially vulnerable to sexual ill-health.

Talking about sex

The provision of positive and accurate information about sexual health issues is seen to be a key element in the promotion of good sexual health (DHSSPS, 2008).

In 2011, the Young Life and Times (YLT) Survey of 16 year olds included a module of questions on sexual health and information. This factsheet focuses on the responses of young men. When asked to say how easy or difficult they found it to talk about sexual matters to each of a list of people, most respondents found it easy to talk to their boyfriend or girlfriend, and a slightly lower proportion said this about close friends. For each person on the list, around one quarter of respondents said that they found it 'neither easy nor difficult' to talk to them about sex. However, many found it especially difficult to talk to family members, such as siblings and parents: four out of ten respondents said this about their mother, and a similar proportion said this about their father.

Table 1: How easy or difficult is it for you to talk to the following people about sexual matters?

	%	
	Easy	Difficult
Your boyfriend or girlfriend	61	5
Close friends	58	6
Brother	23	35
Mother	21	39
Father	18	42
Sister	13	44
A teacher	5	53
Somebody else	23	19

Source: 2011 Young Life and Times Survey

Sex education

The majority of YLT respondents got information on sex from lessons at school (88%), followed by friends (73%) and the internet (53%) – see Table 2. However, a much smaller proportion of young men got such information from their parents: mother (33%) and father (27%). When asked to identify the source of the most helpful information, 45% of respondents said lessons at school, despite the very low proportion saying that they found it easy to talk to teachers about sex. Whilst many respondents said that they had found out about sexual matters from the internet, TV or radio, few of them rated these sources as being the most useful.

Table 2: Sources of information on sexual matters

	% getting information from this source*	% saying this was the most useful source
Lessons at school	88	45
Friends	73	17
The internet	53	14
TV or radio	48	9
Mother	33	6
Books or magazines	32	1
Father	27	3
Girlfriend/boyfriend	24	1
Doctor, nurse or clinic	12	2
Brother	12	1
Church	9	1
Sister	6	0
Help lines or agencies	2	<0.5
None of these	1	1

* respondents could identify more than one source of information

Source: 2011 Young Life and Times Survey

Sexual experience

Just under one quarter of 16 year old men said that they had had sex (23%). Of these, a sizable minority (39%) first had sex when they were 16, whilst a slightly smaller proportion were 15 (35%). One quarter were aged 14 or younger. Half of those who had had sex, have had one sexual partner, whilst 15 per cent have had five or more.

For one quarter of young men, their first time having sex was something that they had planned with their partner (25%), and for a further 20%, they expected it to happen soon, but weren't sure when. In contrast, for 40%, it just happened on the spur of the moment.

For two thirds of those who had had sex, they said that the first time they had sex, it happened about the right time. This includes two thirds of those who said that it happened on the spur of the moment, as well as a similar proportion of those who had planned it together with their partner. Schubotz (2012) explores these data further.

The majority of young men (83%) said that they, or their partner, used a condom when they first had sex. Whilst other forms of contraception were used on that occasion, 12 cannot remember if any form of contraception was used at all on that occasion. One quarter have used emergency contraception at least once.

Patterns of sexual experience were explored among a wider age range within the 2010 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS). Just over one half of those in Year 8 (53%), and 81% of those in Year 12, said they had ever had a girlfriend/boyfriend. Sexual experience increased with age: 29% of those in Year 8 had had a small amount of experience, (such as kissing), while 4% had more intimate experience (but no intercourse) and 2% had had sexual intercourse. The relevant figures for those in Year 12 were 29%, 29% and 20%.

Access to contraception

Just over half (58%) of male respondents to the 2010 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) said they would find it easy to get contraceptives. However, there were variations by year of school: 24% of those in Year 8, compared with 59% in Year 10, and 80% in Year 12. Regardless of which Year they were in, this figure was much higher among those who had sexual experience compared with those who had not.

When asked where they would get contraceptives if they needed them, the most popular sources were shops or chemists (identified by 53% of respondents), followed by other public places, such as bars or public toilets (35% of respondents). Only one in ten said that they would go to a family planning clinic or doctor. Overall, one quarter said that they didn't know where they would get contraceptives from, and this decreased sharply with age: around one half of those in year 8 said that they didn't know, compared with only 4% of those in Year 12.

Table 3: Sources of contraceptives

	%*
Shops/chemists	53
Other public places eg: bars, public toilets	35
Friends	23
Family planning clinics/doctors	11
Parents/other family members	6
Other	6
Would not need to	5
Don't know	23

* respondents could identify more than one source

Source: 2010 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

Knowledge of STIs

The 2010 YPBAS asked students in Years 11 and 12 to identify which of a list of items is a sexually-transmitted disease. Table 4 shows that the vast majority of male pupils knew that AIDS and HIV are sexually-transmitted diseases, with similar proportions in Year 11 and Year 12. Respondents were less familiar with other diseases, such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia, and there was a higher level of knowledge about these diseases among those in Year 12 than among those in Year 11. Some diseases, such as hepatitis B, were only identified by a minority of boys, regardless of which Year they were in. In addition, one in ten respondents identified other diseases (such as influenza or tuberculosis) as being sexually transmitted. It is

important to note that the question asked 'Which, if any, of the following are sexually transmitted diseases?', which could be interpreted in different ways by respondents. In addition, the item 'warts' does not explicitly say that it referred to genital warts.

Table 4: Knowledge of sexually-transmitted diseases

	%				
	Year 11	Year 12		Year 11	Year 12
AIDS	89	88	Hepatitis B	26	35
HIV	87	91	Hepatitis A	25	32
Herpes	68	79	Influenza	11	9
Chlamydia	61	75	Tuberculosis	10	11
Gonorrhoea	51	72	Meningitis	9	8
Syphilis	35	45	Measles	8	6
Warts	30	45	None of these	7	5

Source: 2010 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey

Diagnoses of STIs

In 2010, 7,838 new sexually-transmitted infections (STI) diagnoses were made in Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics in Northern Ireland (Public Health Agency, 2011). The majority of these diagnoses (69%) were in males. For some specific infections, males also made up the majority of diagnoses, for example:

- Of the 1,832 new episodes of uncomplicated chlamydial infection, 57% were within males. In particular, those aged 20-24 years accounted for 41% of all cases in men.
- Of the 203 new episodes of uncomplicated gonorrhoea diagnosed in GUM clinics in Northern Ireland, 84% were among males. Again, the 20-24 years age group were most at risk, and accounted for 43% of the new diagnoses among all males.
- Males also accounted for the majority of 3,033 episodes of genital warts (58%). The highest rate of first infection for men was in the 20-24 years age group. One third of male diagnoses were recurrent infections, compared to one quarter for females.
- Between 2000 and 2010, diagnostic rates for HIV were higher in males than in females. However, the highest rates of diagnosis were within the 25-34 and 35-44 years age groups.

Men made up the minority of new diagnoses for other STIs, such as herpes. However, the data also show that among men, the highest rates of diagnosis are for the 20-24 year olds.

References

Public Health Agency (2011) *HIV and STI Surveillance in Northern Ireland: An analysis of data for the calendar year 2011*, Belfast: PHA

Schubotz, Dirk (2012) *Messed up? Sexual Lifestyles of 16-year olds in Northern Ireland*, ARK Research Update 80, www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update80.pdf

Useful sources of information

www.ark.ac.uk/ylt The 2011 Young Life and Times Survey contained a module of questions on sexual health, and the 2010 survey included questions on sexual risks.

www.publichealthagency.org The Public Health Agency (PHA) produces an annual HIV/STI surveillance report, which collates and analyses data from a variety of sources. Other information on STIs is available from the PHA Health Protection Directorate.

www.csu.nisra.gov.uk The 2010 Young Person's Behaviour and Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) is a school-based survey among Years 8 to 12, which explored a range of issues, including sex, drugs, alcohol, sexual and domestic violence, and social support.