

Key messages about young people and sexual health





The messages about young people, sexual health and relationships in this briefing have emerged from a review of research and consultation published 2019-2021.

The sources range from UK-wide and Scotland-wide research to research conducted within the NHSGGC health board area.

Taken together, these findings contribute to and update our understanding of some of the current behaviours, attitudes and trends regarding young people's sexual health and wellbeing.

safer sex in Scotland



Young people have the highest rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) diagnoses in the population, however young people do not think they are at risk of STIs.

Those in heterosexual relationships worry far more about unintended pregnancy. Pulling out/withdrawal is widely practised by young people in place of contraception or condoms, despite widespread awareness that it is not an effective method of STI or pregnancy prevention. ^(3,4,5)

72% say they would be too embarrassed to speak to someone about getting condoms. ⁽⁵⁾

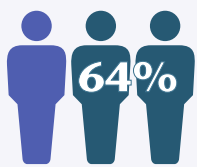
54% of sexually active young people say they never use condoms. ^(3,4)

46% of young people do not know where to get free condoms

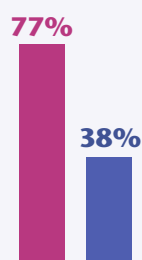
Young people prefer to get condoms in ways that don't require face to face contact. Condoms posted to their home is the preferred option. ⁽⁵⁾

sexually Transmitted Infections in Scotland

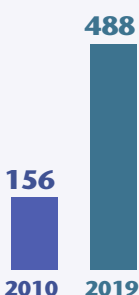
Young people aged less than 25, particularly women, are most at risk of being diagnosed with an STI. ⁽¹⁾



Chlamydia predominates in young people with two thirds (**64%**) of diagnoses among those aged under 25 years. ⁽¹⁾



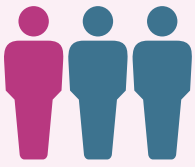
77% of all gonorrhoea diagnoses in **women** were in those aged under 25 while **38%** of diagnoses in men were in those aged under 25. ⁽¹⁾



Of particular note are the increases over time in gonorrhoea in young women aged under 20 which have increased year on year from **156** in 2010 to **488** in 2019, the last year from which data is available. ⁽¹⁾



Health services in Scotland

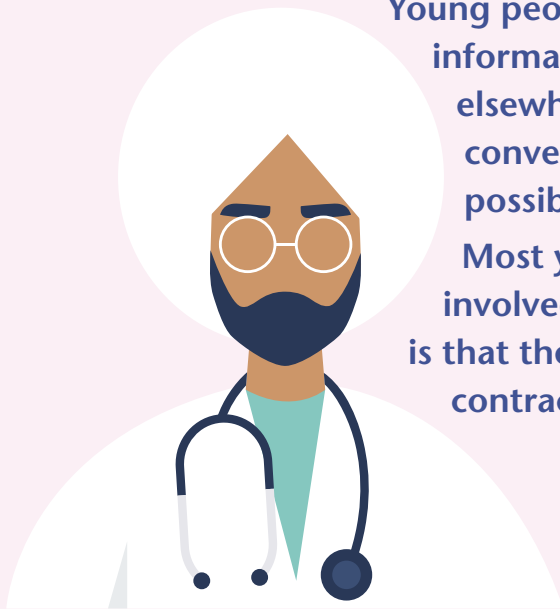


1 in 3 young people say it is difficult to get an appointment for either contraception or STI testing. ⁽⁵⁾

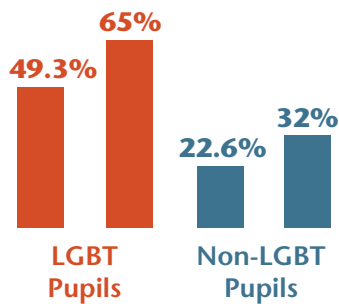
Very few young people want to have a sexual health consultation via video and would prefer an in-person discussion, within a specialist Sexual Health service, booked online. ⁽⁵⁾

Young people use the NHS as a source of accurate information about contraception methods but they look elsewhere (friends, social media) for a fuller conversation about personal experiences of possible side effects. ⁽⁵⁾

Most young people say that both partners should be involved in contraceptive decisions. However, the reality is that the work related to choosing, obtaining and using contraception is done by young women. ⁽⁵⁾



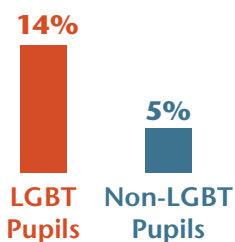
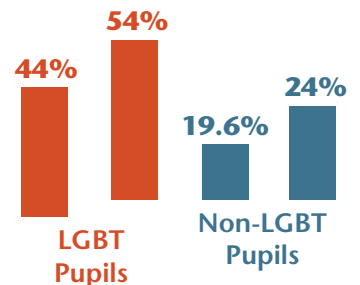
Inequalities



LGBT young people are much more likely than non-LGBT young people to experience emotional and behavioural difficulties, as measured in the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). These have increased, for both groups since 2016 : LGBT pupils, from **49.3%** to **65%** non-LGBT pupils, from **22.6%** to **32%**. ^(3,4)



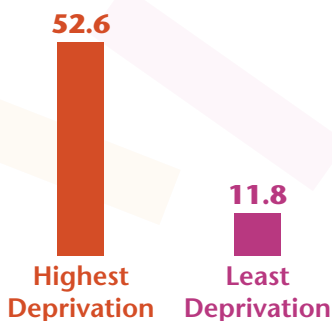
More than double the number of LGBT pupils experience bullying than non-LGBT pupils and this trend has increased since 2016, from **44%** to **54%** for LGBT pupils and **19.6%** to **32%** for non-LGBT pupils. ^(3,4)



Nearly three times as many LGBT pupils than non-LGBT pupils say they have no one to talk to about worries - **14%** compared to **5%**. ^(3,4)

Teenage pregnancy in Scotland

The teenage pregnancy rate in Scotland is at its lowest level since reporting began in 1994. However, rates vary depending on where young women live. ⁽⁸⁾



Those living in the areas of highest deprivation have pregnancy rates more than four times higher than those in the least deprived areas (**52.6** compared to **11.8** per 1,000). ⁽⁸⁾

Young women from the most deprived areas are more likely to deliver than to terminate their pregnancy. In contrast, those from the least deprived areas are more likely to terminate than to deliver. ⁽⁸⁾



Gender inequality in Scotland

56% of girls compared to **21%** of boys worry about the way they look. ^(3,4)

It is common for young people to have learned that masturbation, sexual desire and pleasure is normal for men. Most did not learn this about women. ⁽⁹⁾

Both young men and young women also report learning that it is normal to prioritise men's sexual pleasure. ⁽⁹⁾

Gendered double standards remain around sex where young women who talk about sex are considered 'sluts' while young men who do not demonstrate stereotypical machismo are labelled 'pussies'. ⁽⁶⁾



Sexual consent in Scotland

Fear or anxieties about a sexual partner's response is a barrier to communication about consent. **Young** people worry about being judged or their partner telling others about what they will and won't do sexually, or their partner being 'huffy' or upset. ⁽⁶⁾

Young men think it is enough to seek consent only at the outset of sexual activity; young women would like consent to be communicated verbally and/or non-verbally throughout sexual activity. ⁽⁶⁾

Young people say that they would like to have more examples of how it is possible to talk about consent during sex without it being awkward or changing the mood. ⁽⁶⁾

Young people say that one of the things that would make it easier for them to talk about consent with a partner or prospective partner is feeling more comfortable talking about sex and consent generally. This feels easier for those who grew up with adults who talked to them about relationships and sex. ⁽⁶⁾



Gender based violence in the UK

Sexual harassment and online sexual abuse is much more common for girls to experience than most adults realise. ⁽⁷⁾

The frequency of these harmful sexual behaviours means that some children and young people consider them normal. ⁽⁷⁾

Girls do not want to talk about sexual abuse even if their school encourages them to.

The risk of being ostracised by peers or getting peers into trouble is not considered to be worth it for something perceived by children and young people to be commonplace. ⁽⁷⁾

Boys are much less likely to think these things happen, particularly contact forms of harmful sexual behaviour. ⁽⁷⁾

Gender based violence in the UK cont.

Non-contact forms, but face-to-face ⁽⁷⁾



92% Experienced sexist name-calling

81% Heard rumours about their sexual activity

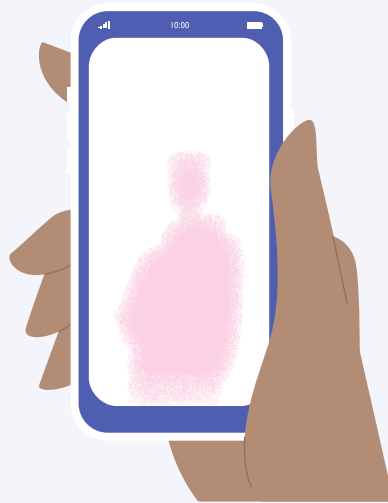
80% Received unwanted or inappropriate comments of a sexual nature

Non-contact forms, online or on social media ⁽⁷⁾

88% Being sent pictures or videos they did not want to see

80% Being put under pressure to provide sexual images of themselves

73% Having pictures or videos that they sent being shared more widely without their knowledge or consent



59% Being photographed or videoed without their knowledge or consent

51% Having pictures or videos of themselves that they did not know about being circulated

Contact forms ⁽⁷⁾

79% Experienced sexual assault of any kind

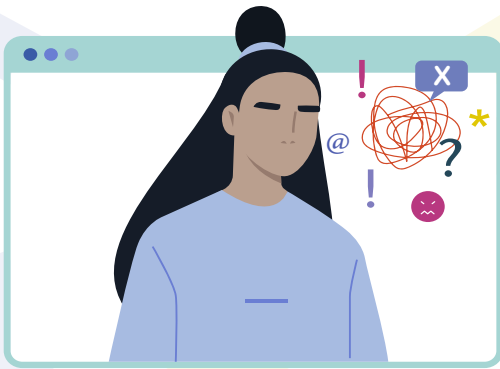
68% Feeling pressured to do sexual things that they did not want to

64% Experienced unwanted touching



Gender based violence in the UK cont.

Online Sexual Abuse in the UK



The Internet Watch Foundation reported an exponential rise in self-generated content where children on their phones and lap tops had clearly been coerced and groomed into sharing graphic sexual images of themselves, without realising these are being recorded and shared. In 2020 they confirmed 68,000 cases of self-generated imagery. This is a **77%** increase on 2019's total of 38,400 reports which included "self-generated" material. New analysis shows in **80%** of these cases, the victims were 11 to 13-year-old girls. ⁽²⁾



References

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4. Leven T (2019) Inverclyde Council Health & Well-Being Survey 2019
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7. OFSTED (2021) Review of Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges
8. Public Health Scotland 2021 Teenage Pregnancy Year of Conception, ending 31 Dec 2019
9. Zero Tolerance (2020) How do Young People Learn about Sex?