



CONCLUSIONS

The limits of school sex education

- Young people clearly want to receive high quality sex education in school, and the SHARE programme was rated higher than existing sex education.
- SHARE is now being made available to schools across the whole of Scotland.
- Teenage pregnancy is unlikely to be influenced by school sex education because it is influenced more by a young person's social situation, whether or not they want to stay on at school and go to university, and local views towards having children.
- Government and health policies need to tackle broad social influences on sexual health, such as the gap between rich and poor, hopes for attending university and poor parenting.
- More research is needed to make sure that different groups of young people get sex education when they most need it.
- Programmes to support parents, especially parents of teenagers and single parents, should all be helpful.

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE SHARE STUDY AND MAKING IT POSSIBLE!

For more detailed information, please visit the SHARE website at www.sphsu.mrc.ac.uk/studies/share/

Sexual Health And RElationships: Safe, Happy And REsponsible

News for Participants

Thank you for your help and support with the SHARE study.

You may remember that at school, in S3 and S5, you took part in a study to develop better sex education for young people – the SHARE study.

This study was set up because of serious concerns about several aspects of young people's sexual health:

- the increasing teenage abortion rate
- the increasing evidence that Chlamydia and other sexually transmitted infections are widespread
- the high level of occasions when people feel under pressure to have sex.

The study had two objectives:

- to evaluate whether a new sex education programme, SHARE, could improve the quality of young people's sexual relationships and reduce their sexual risks, and
- to look into the main social factors which influenced young people's sexual behaviour.

In order to assess the impact of the SHARE programme we recruited 25 schools. These were randomly divided into two groups: 13 schools used SHARE sex education whilst 12 continued with their existing sex education lessons.

Almost 8,000 of you took part at some stage, by answering questionnaires at ages 13/14 and 15/16 in school, and at 17/18 and 19/20 years at home. At age 20, NHS data were used to calculate the rates of pregnancies and abortions amongst the young women in each group in the study. The NHS only provided information at group level and no information that could identify individuals was provided.

This newsletter gives a summary of the main findings of this study. For more detailed information, please visit the SHARE website at www.sphsu.mrc.ac.uk/studies/share

The SHARE study was funded by the Medical Research Council, a government-funded but independent body. The study was carried out by scientists from the MRC Social and Public Health Sciences Unit which specialises in studying social influences on health.

SHARE Evaluation

Main findings:

Compared with conventional sex education

- By age 16, SHARE sex education had no impact on the age at which young people first have sex, on the number of sexual partners they have or the use of contraceptives.
- By age 20, SHARE also had no impact on the number of pregnancies or abortions amongst young women in the study.
- However, SHARE led to less regret of early sexual experiences.
- SHARE improved practical sexual health knowledge.
- Both teachers and pupils preferred SHARE sex education to the existing sex education.

Findings on young peoples' sexual behaviour

The timing of sexual experience varies considerably...

- 10% of young people reported having sex before the age of 15.
- By age 16, 37% of young people (31% of boys and 41% of girls) reported having had sex.
- However, other national studies show that 10% of young people say they did not have sex until 19 years or older.
- The younger people were when they first had sex the more likely they were to regret the experience.

Frequency of sex

Of those who had had sex by age 16...

- 20% had only had sex once
- 34% had done so less than three times in the last year
- 33% reported only one partner
- 22% of boys and 17% of girls reported having had more than five partners.

Pressure to have sex

Of those who had had sex by age 16...

- For first sexual intercourse, 22% of girls and 10% of boys said they were under pressure from their partner.
- For most recent sexual intercourse, 10% of girls and 7% of boys said they were under pressure from their partner.

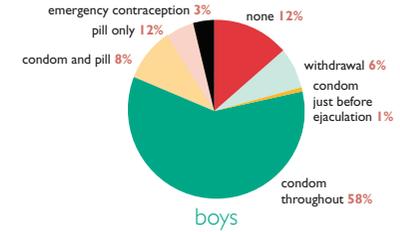
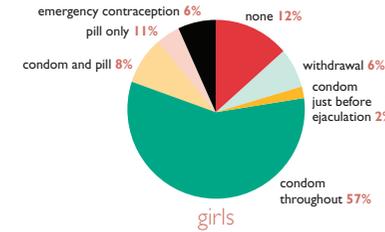


Use of contraceptives

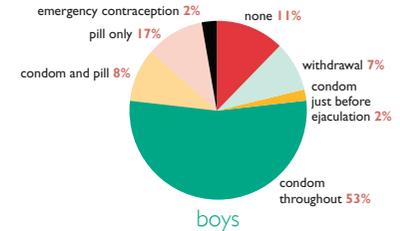
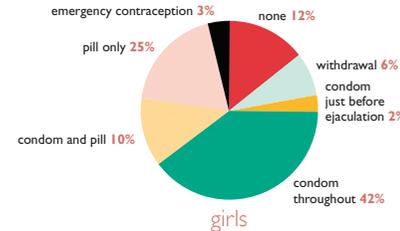
Of those who had had sex by age 16:

- 67% of both girls and boys reported using condoms at first intercourse.
- 12% of both girls and boys reported using no contraception at first intercourse.

Contraceptives / precautions at first sex



Contraceptives / precautions at most recent sex



Young people's use of sexual health clinics and services

- 33% of 16 year olds had visited their GP or a specialist sexual health service for sexual health advice.
- Girls were more likely than boys to seek advice.
- 43% of those seeking advice had used a youth service.
- 45% of those who reported having sex by age 16 had not used a clinic or service.
- Those using sexual health clinics and services were likely to have a clear 'need': experience of sex or having a boy/girlfriend and expecting to have sex in the near future.

Parents' influences on young people's sexual behaviour

- Having parents who paid little attention to what their children did in the evenings was linked to earlier age of first sex; for girls, it was also linked to more sexual partners and not using a condom.
- Having a lot of spending money is linked to early sexual activity for both sexes and, for boys, it also predicted having more sexual partners.
- Being comfortable talking with parents about sex did not seem to influence young people's sexual behaviour.
- Teenagers living with only one biological parent were more likely to have sex in their early teens.

Other influences on young people's sexual behaviour

- At age 16, girls had higher levels of sexual experience than boys, but they experienced greater pressure from partners to have sex and they were more likely to regret the experience.
- Having greater religious belief was associated with lower levels of sexual experience and greater condom use.
- Girls from better-off families were more likely to delay having sex until an older age, and more likely to use condoms.
- However, condom use was influenced mainly by whether sexual partners planned and communicated about sex and contraception.