

Young adults, sexual behaviour and multiple relationship partners

Data from the Australian longitudinal
study of health and relationships

Jason Ferris

Research Team

Anthony Smith, ARCSHS, La Trobe

Marian Pitts, ARCSHS

Juliet Richters, UNSW

Julia Shelley, ARCSHS and Deakin

Judy Simpson, USyd

Jason Ferris, ARCSHS

Richard Ryall, ARCSHS

ALSHR – is based at ARCSHS

Aim

- To highlight the formation of relationships among young Australian adults.
- identify patterns of sexual behaviours and contraceptive use that may place them at risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or unwanted pregnancies.

Background

- Research has readily identified strong links between multiple partners and
 - HIV, STIs (e.g, chylamdia and syphilis)
 - Unwanted pregnancies
- Simulation disease models emphasis greater risks between concurrent sexual partners and disease
- Research is on clinical samples not population

Definitions

- Multiple sex partners:
 - Engaged in sex with more than 1 partner over a particular time frame (e.g., 12 months, 5 years, lifetime)
 - Assumed to be sequential
- Concurrent partners:
 - Engaged in sex with at least 1 other partner whilst in a *ongoing* relationship (non-exclusive)
 - By definition concurrent is also multiple

Background

- Studies have shown population rates of sexual concurrency ranging from 10 to 25%
- US data from National Survey of Family Growth (aged 15-44):
 - 12% of women (in the previous 5 years) and 11% of men (in the previous year)
- UK population based study (NATSAL):
 - 25% of married men and 15% of married women had engaged in extramarital sexual intercourse
 - Less than 4% in the previous 12 months
- ‘Sex in Australia’ (aged 16-59)
 - 4.9% of men and 2.9% of women in heterosexual relationships

Operational definition

- Concurrency is determined by:
- people whose current relationship has been greater than 12 months
- and who have reported having sex with more than one person during the previous 12 months.

Method

- Data from the Australian Longitudinal Study of Health and Relationships
 - began in 2005
 - Panel 4 currently underway
- 8656 Australians aged 16–64
 - 4366 females, 4290 males
- Representative household sample
- Selected by random digit dialing
- Computer-assisted telephone interview

Young adults

- Young adults between 16 and 25
- Unweighted (n=1114):
 - 535 (48%) females, 579 (52%) males
- Weighted (n=1565):
 - 721 (46%) females, 844 (54%) males

Results

Partner status during the last 12 months

	Females	Males
	n (%)	n (%)
Never had intercourse	166 (23)	160 (19)
No sex last 12 months	32 (4)	52 (6)
Last sex partner - casual	141 (20)	258 (31)
Regular (only 1 partner)	304 (42)	239 (28)
Regular (serial sex partners)	67 (9)	98 (12)
Concurrent sex partners	12 (2)	37 (4)

Results

With a regular partner during the last 12 months

	Females	Males
	n (%)	n (%)
Regular (only 1 partner)	304 (80)	239 (64)
Regular (serial sex partners)	67 (17)	98 (26)
Concurrent sex partners	12 (3)	37 (10)

Results

Currently with a regular partner - concurrency

	Females	Males
	n (%)	n (%)
Young adults 16-25	12 (3)	37 (10)
Adults 26-40	12 (1)	12 (1)
Adults 41-64	13 (1)	38 (2)
Total population	37 (1)	87 (3)

Results

Ever had an STI

(Chlamydia, syphilis, gonorrhoea, genital warts, genital herpes)

	Females	Males
	n (%)	n (%)
Regular (only 1 partner)	20 (7)	7 (2)
Regular (serial sex partners)	7 (10)	6 (6)
Concurrent sex partners	0	1 (2)

Results

Condom use partners (concurrent heterosexuals only)

	Females	Males
	n (%)	n (%)
No condoms	2 (50)	4 (17)
With 1 partner	2 (50)	6 (23)
With both partners	0	15 (60)

Results

Having an affair when in a committed relationship
is always wrong (agree)

	Females	Males
	n (%)	n (%)
Regular (only 1 partner)	279 (92)	220 (92)
Regular (serial sex partners)	59 (89)	88 (90)
Concurrent sex partners	8 (71)	30 (81)

Discussion

- Of young adults in a relationship 28% reported more than 1 sexual partner in the previous 12 months (36% males, 21% females)
- 6% of young adults (10% males, 3% females) reported concurrent sexual partners whilst in a relationship – greater than previously indicated in 'Sex in Australia'

Discussion

Of those in a relationship who had *multiple partners*:

- 63% were men
- 90% identified as heterosexual
- 12% lived with one of their partners
- Age at first sex for young adults with multiple partners was typically younger
- (16.0 years; 95%CI 15.6–16.3) compared to those currently in a single regular relationship (17.0 years; 95% CI 16.8 to 17.1)

Implications

- GPs/health practitioners to provide environments where young adults can disclose their sexual behaviour
- To provide information about the risks of multiple partners and in particular relationship concurrency

Future

To model:

- Incidence of concurrent relationships
- Incidence of acquired STIs or unwanted pregnancies as a result of concurrency