

» Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration

In Focus: Condoms

The Federal Centre for Health Education's (BZgA) representative study Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration is a representative repeat survey. A large-scale survey of young people, their parents and young adults was launched for the ninth time in the summer of 2019. It follows on from predecessor studies conducted between 1980 and 2014. The goal of the study is to acquire reliable data about the attitudes and behaviours of young people in the Federal Republic of Germany with regards to sexuality and contraception.

Currently, 28 percent of adolescents between 14 and 17 and 82 percent of the young adults between 18 and 25 say that they have had sexual intercourse at least once. For the vast majority of the sexually active young people it is fortunately true that contraception is a given even for the first time. When young people are just becoming sexually active, condoms remain the unsailable contraception of choice.

This fact sheet presents the core results on the contraceptive behaviours regarding condoms for the group of sexually active adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25 from the current survey Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration.

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Condoms are the no. 1 contraceptive for the first time.

With increasing sexual experience young people alter their contraceptive behaviour. For the sexually active adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25 condoms are particularly relevant in the early phase of sexual activity. Figure 1 provides an overview of the contraceptive behaviour of adolescents and young adults at three different points in time.

Result 1

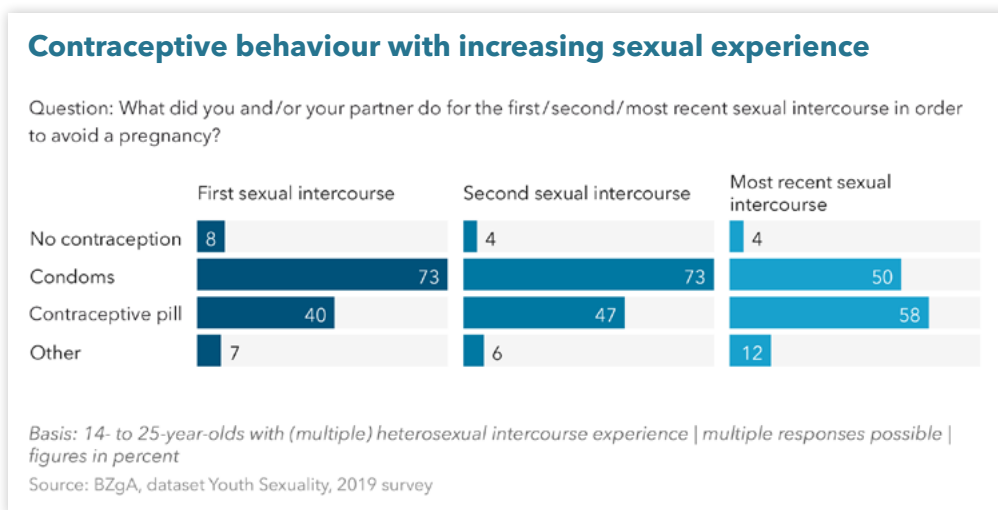


Figure 1

The high level of condom use for the first time is matched by the second time (both 73%). With increasing sexual experience the usage rate then drops markedly so that most recently the majority of the adolescents and young adults used the contraceptive pill (58%) instead of condoms (50%).

Looking at the trend, this is true for both sexes. When it comes to contraception, boys and young men prefer to use condoms for longer than their female counterparts. Even for their most recent sexual intercourse experience 57 percent said they used condoms (girls/young women: 42%). The contraceptive pill was used in the majority of cases during the most recent sexual intercourse for both the male and female respondents (male: 55%; female 61%).

[See Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration - Fact Sheet 'In Focus: The Contraceptive Pill'](#)



The combination strategy - meaning the joint use of the contraceptive pill as birth control and condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs) - reaches its highest value among the three measured values for the second time (27%). After this point the exclusive use of the contraceptive pill increases up until the most recent sexual intercourse (only the contraceptive pill: 37%). At this point 27 percent of the boys and 32 percent of the young men used only condoms as their contraceptive method.

Overall, practically all sexually active adolescents and young adults between 14 and 25 have used condoms as a form of contraception: nine in ten adolescents and young adults who have had sexual intercourse more than once say that they have used condoms (93%). Alongside the contraceptive pill (80%) condoms are therefore the contraceptive that is the most widespread among 14- to 25-year-olds.

Result 2

Condoms are most commonly used outside of steady relationships.

The relationship status has a strong influence on whether condoms were used during the most recent sexual intercourse or not. Among those who are not in a steady relationship, condoms have a substantially higher relevance as a contraceptive than among those in a steady relationship (63% versus 40%).

Among the sexually active boys and young men who are not in a steady relationship, this is even more true than among the girls and young women in the equivalent situation (69% versus 54%), but this is because the male respondents use condoms more often generally. The differences depending on the situation - in or not in a steady relationship - are relatively similar; they are around 20 percentage points for both sexes.

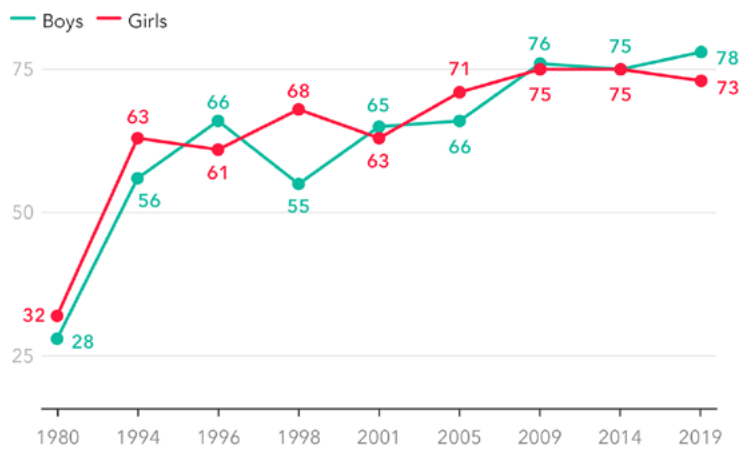
Condom use has been at a very high level for decades.

Result 3

The first iteration in the Youth Sexuality series was conducted in 1980. That means - at least for the adolescents between 14 and 17 without a migrant background - there is trend data on condom use for the first time going back four decades. Young people's contraceptive behaviour has undergone a marked shift during this period. This shift does not just refer to the general attitude as to whether contraception is used for the first time and who feels responsible for it, but also to the choice of contraceptive used (see Figure 2).

Using condoms as contraception during the first time (long-term trend)

Question: What did you and/or your partner do for the first sexual intercourse in order to avoid a pregnancy?



Basis: 14- to 17-year-olds with German citizenship / from 2014: without a migrant background with (heterosexual) intercourse experience | figures in percent

Source: BZgA dataset Youth Sexuality, 1980, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2014, 2019 surveys

Figure 2

Even 40 years ago condoms were the top entry contraceptive for German young people, even though they were only used in one of three first sexual intercourse experiences at the time. By the mid-nineties, the usage percentage had grown to double that figure. Around two in three young people in the second half of the 1990s consistently reported into the new millennium that they had used condoms for their first time. The stabilisation of the usage rates at such a high level is likely also due to the fact that HIV/AIDS has increasingly come into the public consciousness since the eighties and pertinent campaigns presented condoms as effective protection against sexually transmitted infections.

From 2005 there was once again an increasing usage percentage. This was the first time the 70-percent mark was crossed by the girls. Four years later the boys did the same. In 2009 three in four girls and boys (also) used condoms as the contraceptive for their first time. This magnitude has been repeated for both sexes during the subsequent surveys.

Some of these increases in the use of condoms and the contraceptive pill come from the fact that other contraceptive methods have been pushed into the background over time (chemical contraceptives have lost all significance compared to 1980) and that contraceptives are generally used more often. Other contraceptive methods, including unsafe ones, are rare these days - in contrast to 1980, when this was true for roughly every fifth boy (20%) and almost as many girls (17%). Even in 1994, the percentage of young people who had used alternative contraceptives/methods was still in the double digits.

The high level of condom use cannot be viewed in isolation, however. It is not just condoms that have seen increases over the decades. The same is true for the contraceptive pill. Since 1998, the percentage of respondents who have used the pill as a contraceptive from the onset of their sexual activity has grown steadily. Most recently however, the pill has seen a noticeable drop in usage among girls and young women, which is associated with a more critical attitude towards how well the pill is tolerated.

[See Youth Sexuality
9th Iteration - Fact Sheet
'In Focus: The Contraceptive
Pill'](#)

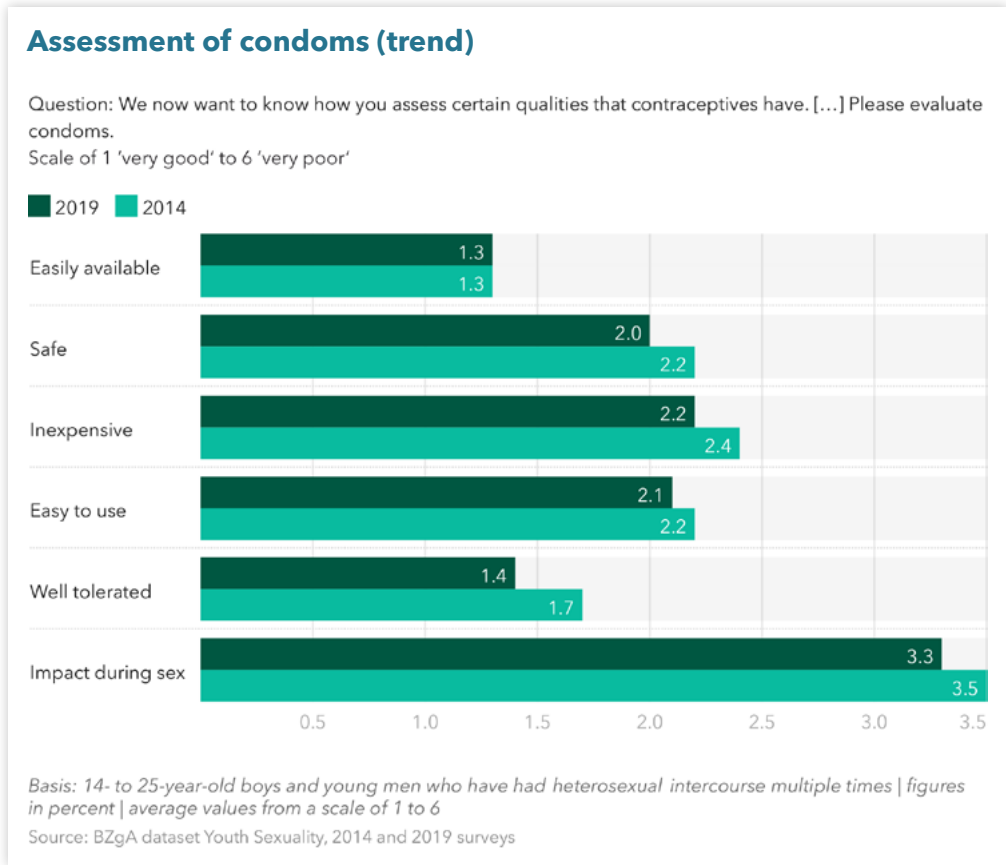


Assessment of condoms: easy to obtain and well tolerated.

Result 4

Adolescents and young adults who exhibit a certain level of sexual experience (who have had sexual intercourse multiple times) were also asked to assess various contraceptive methods. This section focuses on the evaluation of condoms from the perspective of the (potential) direct users. Evaluating the six criteria surveyed (availability, efficacy, ease of use, price, tolerability, and impact on sensation during sex) was done using a six-point scale, where 1 was 'very good' and 6 was 'very poor' (see Figure 3).

Figure 3



Looking at all the criteria together, condoms achieve an overall grade of 2.05 among their (potential) users. Compared to the contraceptive pill (overall grade of 2.22 among its (potential) users), condoms achieve better ratings almost everywhere among the sexually active adolescents and young adults. That was not yet the case five years ago. In the 2014 survey the overall grade given to condoms was worse than today's grade (2.22). And on the flipside, the pill as given a slightly better grade in 2014 than it was in the 2019 survey (2.15).

The great advantage of condoms from the perspective of their (potential) users is still how easy they are to get. In this area condoms remain obviously superior to the contraceptive pill. However, there is an additional aspect that can be considered a clear strength of this contraceptive: its tolerability. The average grade given here is 1.4, which makes the grade for this criterion just as positive as the one for easy availability. Especially when compared to the contraceptive pill condoms are viewed more positively in these areas.

The pill's tolerability is judged much more critically now compared to 2014 and only achieves an average grade of 3.1 now. While one in five (potential) users of the pill believe that it is (very) poor for their health, almost no one thinks this about condoms (1 %).

[See Youth Sexuality
9th Iteration - Fact Sheet
'In Focus: The Contraceptive
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Furthermore: unlike the pill, condoms achieve better grades in all criteria than in 2014. It is possible that the tolerability attributed to condoms also has a positive impact on the perception of condoms in the other areas. In any case, even the biggest flaw condoms have - that they have a negative effect on the quality of sensation during sex - is no longer seen in as critical a light as it was five years ago. The effects of condoms on sex remain a disadvantage for a good one in five (potential) users (has a negative effect on sex: 22 %), but the majority do not see a serious problem here. One in three boys and young men even believe that using condoms has a good or very good effect on sex.

The evaluations do not exhibit any larger differences with regard to the respondents' social characteristics. However, the impact of condoms on sexual sensation is judged significantly more critically among the young men than among the sexually active boys (3.3 versus 2.9). 44 percent among the 14- to 17-year-olds said that using condoms had a (very) good effect on their sexual activity; but among the 18- to 25-year-olds only 31 percent shared this view.

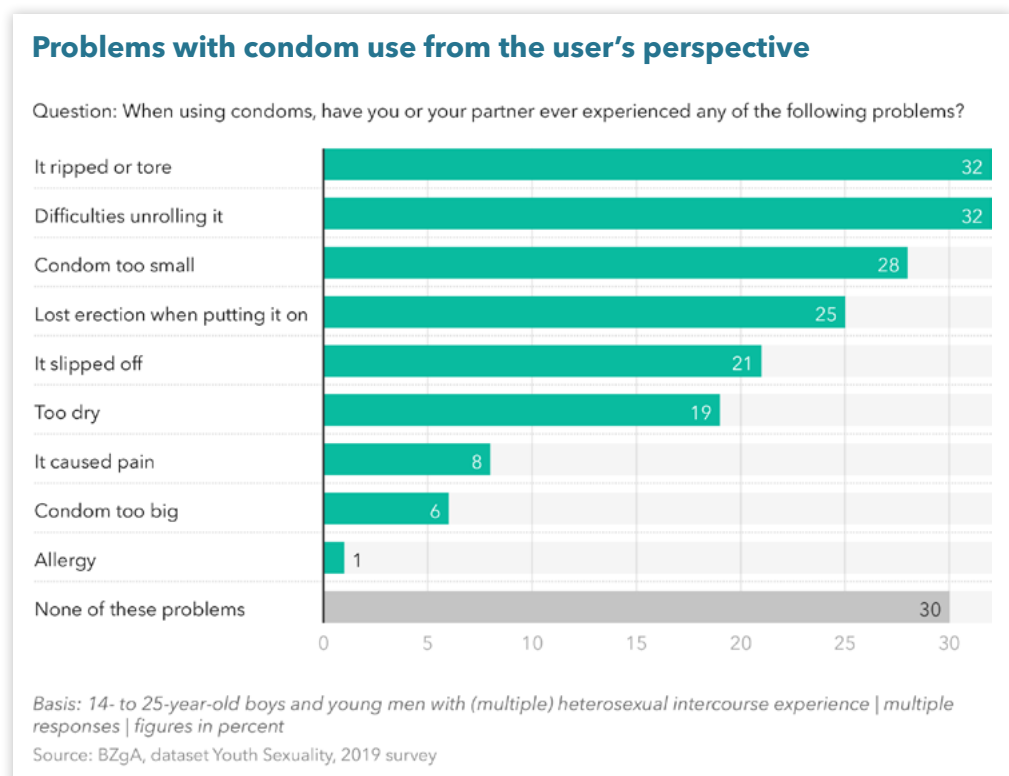
Result 5

The handling of condoms is one of the most important problems of use.

Not everyone who has already used condoms reports problems with their use. 30 percent of the male condom users said they had had no problems. However, those who have had problems using condoms, report 1.7 of the nine set answers as a problem on average (see Figure 4).

- The most commonly reported problem by users is that the condom has ripped or torn - around every third user (32 %) has experienced such a potentially critical situation.
- 32 percent struggled with unrolling it correctly.
- There were sizing issues too: 28 percent said the product was too small, 6 percent said it was too big.

Figure 4



To what extent the response 'it slipped off' - cited as a problem by one in five (21 %) - reflects a sizing issue cannot be determined; however, it is not unlikely that the relative sizes play a role here too.

Every fourth respondent reported sensation problems when putting the condom on (loss of the erection: 25 %). Condoms are a contraceptive that is present throughout the act for both sexual partners. The most positive and negative aspects are obvious to the participants during their use. Consequently it follows that the statements made by the users regarding the problems with using condoms largely match the observations of the girls and young women whose sexual partners have worn condoms before.

There seem to be slightly different feelings among the sexes with regard to the aspect 'too dry'. While every fourth woman said that the condom felt too dry (25 %), only 19 percent of the men shared this negative view. And the evaluations deviate in a further area too: 15 percent of the women reported pain, while only 8 percent of the male users said the same.

A condom that burst or ripped was the reason for half of the girls and young women surveyed to take the 'morning-after pill' as emergency contraception in order to avoid a pregnancy.

[See Figure 3 in: Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration - Fact Sheet 'Emergency Contraception'](#)





References

Census UK (2019): Tolland, L. & Evans, J. (2019, February 21). *What is the difference between sex and gender?* Gov.uk; Office for National Statistics. Available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/whatisthedifferencebetweensexandgender/2019-02-21> [accessed 3 April 2023]

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Notes on the data



- As the percentages shown has been rounded to whole numbers, it is possible that they may not add up to 100 percent.
- For the same reason the combined categories (e.g. 'very satisfied' and 'mostly satisfied') can deviate from the sum of the individual categories depicted.
- For questions where the respondents were able to pick several answers, the total figure can exceed 100 percent.
- Where data is available from previous surveys, the survey results are shown in a trend comparison. Because of how the samples were done it is possible to see the long-term trend covering almost 40 years for boys and girls between 14 and 17 without a migrant background.
- Participants are deemed to have a migrant background if they themselves or at least one parent was born without German citizenship; this definition is also used by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021).
- The level of education is determined by the (desired) qualifications the study participants were / are seeking at school based on the education system in Germany. Low: 9 years of school, most are around 15 years old when they leave (e.g. Hauptschule) Moderate: 10 years of school, most are around 16 years old when they leave (e.g. mittlere Reife). High: 12 to 13 years of school, most are 18 to 19 years old when they leave (e.g. Abitur).
- Because of the methodological design of the Youth Sexuality Study a further non-binary differentiation of gender has had to be left out. For this same reason, the term 'sex' (biological aspects, assigned by birth) continues to be used (in contrast to 'gender' in the sense of social construction, gender identity as personal internal perception of oneself) to enable statements on long-term trends (see also Census UK, 2019). This decision is purely a methodological necessity and not based on a lack of awareness of diversity here.

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The Research Project: Background, Research Team, Methodology

The Federal Centre for Health Education's (BZgA) representative study Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration is a repeat survey. In the summer of 2019 the ninth large-scale survey of young people, their parents and young adults began. A total of 6,032 interviews were conducted nationwide. Since 1980, the BZgA has been investigating the attitudes and behaviour of young people in the Federal Republic of Germany with regard to sexuality education, sexuality and contraception. This current study follows on from the previous years' studies with the explicit aim of illustrating trends.

Project profile

Client	Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)
Project lead	Angelika Hessling, BZgA
Survey institute	Kantar GmbH
Survey population	Adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25
Survey method	Computer-supported combined oral-written survey; for the more intimate questions the questionnaire was to be filled out by the respondents without the interviewers being able to see.
Selection method	A disproportionately selected quota sample with regards to sex, age and migrant background
Sample of young people	6,032 interviews of which 3,556 were with adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 and 2,476 with young adults between 18 and 25
Sample: parents	In the households of the 14- to 17-year-old adolescents without a migrant background one parent was also surveyed (2,422 interviews)
Weighting	All the data shown underwent a representative weighting in order to remove the sample's disproportionalities caused by the design.
Survey period	May to October 2019



More information about the study Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration Central results and further fact sheets

<https://www.sexualaufklaerung.de/en/english/projects/detail/youth-sexuality-9th-iteration/>