

» Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration

Relationships

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.

This fact sheet is an overview of how adolescents and young adults in Germany live their relationships and of how widespread relationships are among adolescents. The subjects of contraception and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in relationships are also covered. There are no differences here between heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

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Result 1

Almost half of the young adults are in steady relationships.

Relationships play a role for many adolescents and young adults in the ninth survey iteration on Youth Sexuality: a total of 41 percent of the respondents between the ages of 14 and 25 say they are in a steady relationship. Generally speaking these are heterosexual relationships; in 3 percent of cases the relationships are homosexual.

On the other hand, the formally regulated cohabitation of marriage (including civil partnerships and same-sex marriages) plays almost no role for those up to the age of 25. Of the 18- to 25-year-old women and men, 4 percent said they were married; none of the respondents were in a civil partnership or a same-sex marriage.

The number of adolescents and young adults in steady relationships grows steadily with age (see Table 1). While a mere 3 percent of girls and boys aged 14 say they are in a steady relationship, that figure has risen to 61 percent among the oldest respondents (25-year-olds).

Presence of a relationship (by age group)

	14- to 15- year-olds	16- to 17- year-olds	18- to 20- year-olds	21- to 25- year-olds
Girls / young women	7	37	47	66
Boys / young men	7	33	34	45

Here: 'Yes, I'm currently in a steady relationship / married.'

Basis: 14- to 25-year-olds | figures in percent

Source: BZgA, dataset Youth Sexuality, 2019 survey

Table 1

Boys and young men generally enter steady relationships later than girls and young women. Consequently, the number of male respondents between 14 and 25 saying they are in a steady relationship is always lower than that of the female respondents in the same age group.

Compared to the Youth Sexuality survey in 2014, the percentage of steady relationships has declined somewhat, especially among the younger respondents. At the time 45 percent of the 14- to 25-year-olds said they were in a relationship; in 2019 this figure was 41 percent. The clearest difference can be seen among the adolescents: among the 14- to 15-year-old girls and boys the percentages are halved. Just 7 percent say they are in a steady relationship, compared to 14 percent in 2014.

Result 2

Two in three relationships have been in place for at least a year.

The question about the duration of the relationship illustrates what 'steady relationship' means. How long a relationship has been in existence depends on the age of the adolescents and young adults (see Figure 1). Among the younger respondents the relationships are often still quite new, whereas for the older ones they tend to have been in place for longer.

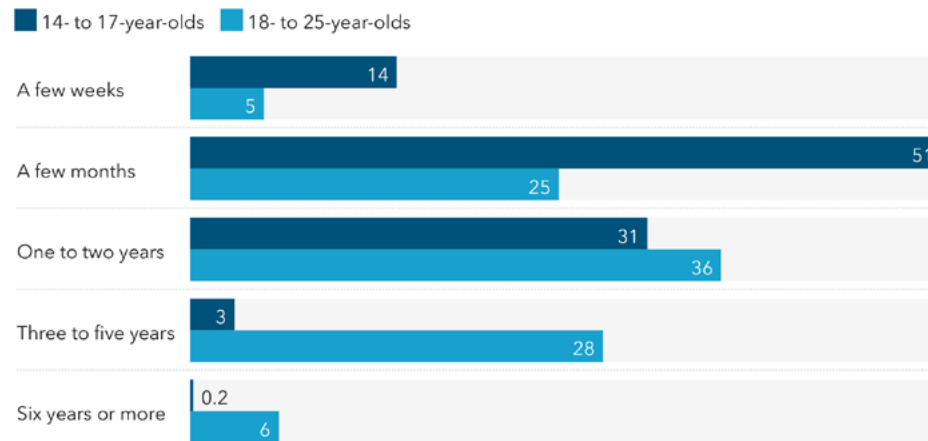
The relationship has been in place for a few weeks or months among:

- 74 percent of the 14 and 15-year-olds
- 63 percent of the 16 and 17-year-olds
- 44 percent of the 18- to 20-year-olds
- 23 percent of the 21- to 25-year-olds

Marriages and civil partnerships or same-sex marriages are included in these figures.

Relationship duration (by age)

Question: How long have you been in a relationship with your current partner?



Basis: 14- to 25-year-olds in steady relationships or marriages (including same-sex marriages) | figures in percent

Source: BZgA, dataset Youth Sexuality, 2019 survey

Figure 1

34 percent of the 14- to 17-year-olds in relationships said they had been with their current partner for at least one year. Among the 18- to 25-year-olds this figure was double, at 70 percent.

The number of sexual partners to date also increases with age. The majority of the 14- to 17-year-olds have had one or two sexual partners so far. This response was given by:

- 71 percent of the girls
- 65 percent of the boys

Result 3

Communication about contraception is open and taken for granted.

Young people today are open about the subjects of sexuality and contraception: nine in ten adolescents and young adults (92%) who have discussed contraception in their relationship report that they found these conversations easy rather than hard.

Experiencing sexuality normatively seems to be tied to a relationship for many young adults. If there is a steady relationship, then sexual intercourse tends to be part of that: 92 percent of the adolescents and young adults in relationships said they were sexually active. To compare: when looking at all 14- to 25-year-olds, it is just 66 percent who are sexually active.

It also fits in with this finding that young adults who were in a relationship at the time of the survey were also much more likely to say they had sexual intercourse 'regularly' compared to those not in a relationship (82% compared to 17% not in a relationship).

As a result, contraception becomes a very important topic for heterosexual relationships. It is positive that almost all the male and female respondents said that

- the topic of contraception was discussed with their partner (92 %)
- especially when sexual experience is already present (both 94 %)

Girls and young women in particular address contraception as an upcoming issue, meaning when sexual intercourse has not yet happened (see Figure 2).

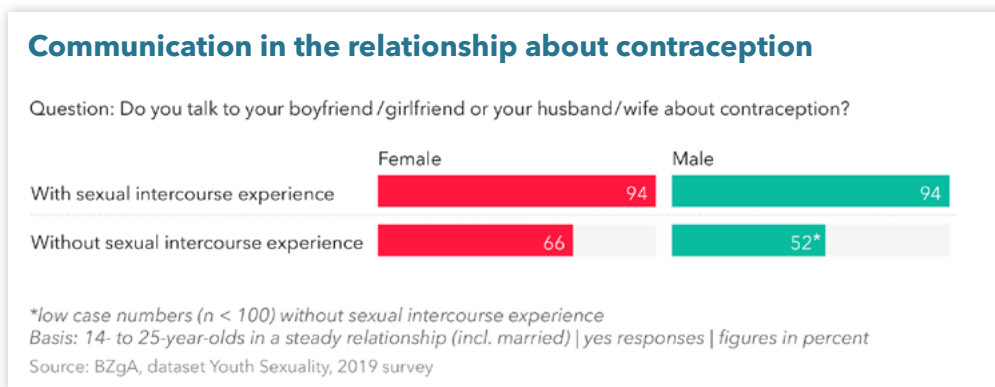


Figure 2

Result 4

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are addressed less often than contraception.

Even though communication about contraception is quite standard in relationships for young people these days, that is not true to the same extent for communication about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are still internationally widespread: in 2012 the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that around 360 million new infections occurred for just four types of STI. In Germany, for example, we can assume that in 2015 more than 3,000 people became infected with HIV; at the same time around 85,000 people lived with HIV in 2015. That same year almost 7,000 cases of syphilis were reported (Bremer, V., Dudareva-Vizule, S., Buder, S., Heiden, M. an der & Jansen, K., 2017, pp. 949-950). The right knowledge about STIs is an important preventive measure and contributes to avoiding contracting such an infection (see also the BZgA website liebesleben.de). Open communication about the subject, including with sexual partners is an important aspect of prevention.

Adult young women and men in steady relationships said the following on this topic as part of the ninth Iteration in the Youth Sexuality series: only seven in ten young adults have already addressed this topic with their partner (70 %).

There are no notable differences when broken down by the respondents' age or level of education. Among the young adults with a migrant background the subject of sexually transmitted infections is discussed even more rarely, at 63 percent.

It is usually the female partner who bears the responsibility for contraception.

Result 5

Open, relaxed communication about contraception characterises the adolescents and young adults in the ninth iteration of the BZgA representative survey. But what about the implementation of contraception and who bears the responsibility?

If we look at the attitude towards contraception, it becomes clear that both sexes are involved.

- Of the sexually active girls under the age of 18, 77 percent say they 'always pay close attention' to making sure a pregnancy cannot occur.
- Among the sexually active boys the vast majority is also conscientious about contraceptive matters (68 %).

The majority of the sexually active adolescents and young adults in steady relationships (55 %) say: 'We're both responsible for contraception' (see Figure 3).

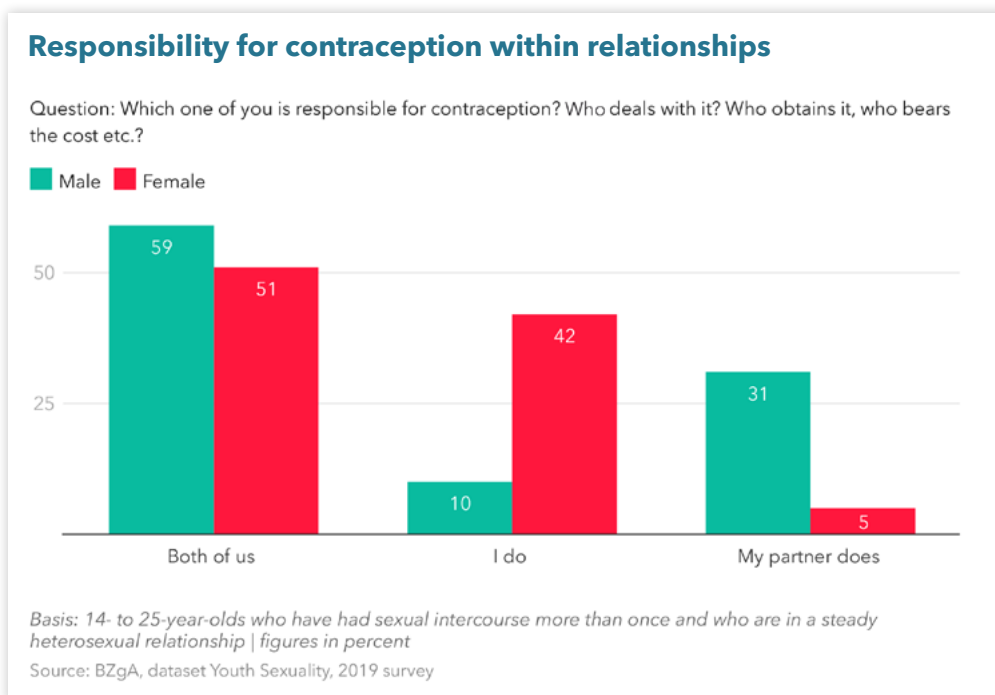


Figure 3

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



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



However, when looking at the overall picture, it becomes clear that the female partner is more often the one with the main responsibility for implementing the contraception. The 14- to 17-year-old girls are much more likely than the boys to say they have sole responsibility (34 % compared to 18 %). This difference between the sexes increases in the 18- to 25-year-old cohort:

- Only 8 percent of the adult men say they feel responsible.
- 43 percent of the young women meanwhile feel they are responsible for contraception.

This shift is associated with the switch to the contraceptive pill as the sole form of contraception - a shift that is the norm in long-term relationships.

If the contraceptive pill was used during the last intercourse in the relationship, then 48 percent of the girls and young women say they had the responsibility over contraception (boys/young men 4 %).

Fidelity in the relationship is usually a must.

Result 6

If young adults are in a steady relationship, then the majority of these last for longer periods of time. In these relationships sexual fidelity is of great significance for many. The women and men between the ages of 18 and 25 were asked about this in more detail.

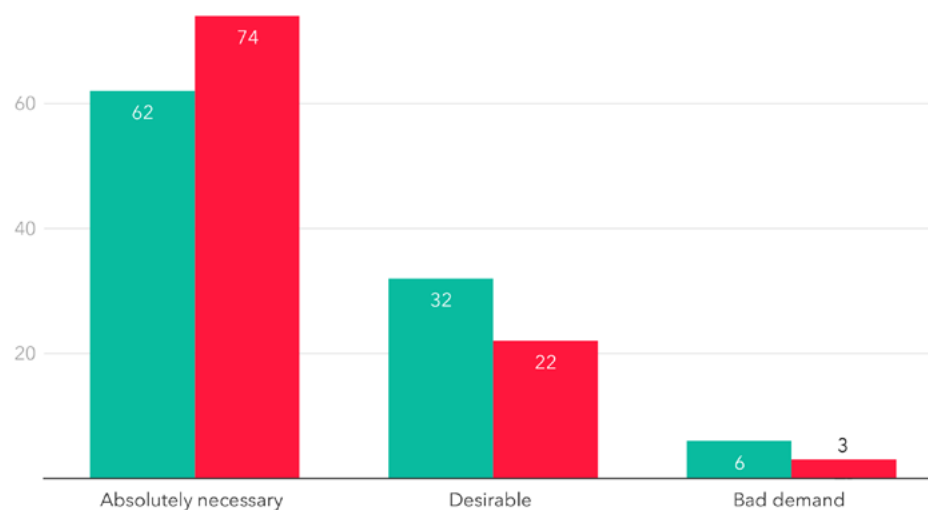
Hardly anyone believes the demand for sexual fidelity is expressly wrong (5%). However, there are differences between the sexes with regard to whether sexual fidelity was 'absolutely necessary' (see Figure 4):

- Young women between the ages of 18 and 25 are more likely to say that sexual fidelity is absolutely necessary than men.
- Young men between the ages of 18 and 25 are more likely than women to move to the assessment that sexual fidelity in a relationship is 'desirable'.

Attitudes of the young women and men between the ages of 18 and 25 about sexual fidelity in a relationship

Question: What is your attitude towards sexual fidelity in a relationship?

Male Female



Basis: 18- to 25-year-olds | figures in percent
Source: BZgA, dataset Youth Sexuality, 2019 survey

Figure 4

Young women and men who are currently in a steady relationship themselves are more likely to say sexual fidelity is absolutely necessary (80 % and 67 %) than those who are not in a steady relationship (67 % and 58 %).

The responses to this question are partially shaped by

- migrant background
- religious background

Sexual fidelity is particularly important for the young women with a Turkish background (absolutely necessary: 90 %) as well as for women with a migrant background generally (79 %). Among the women without migrant background 73 percent said sexual fidelity in a relationship was absolutely necessary.

Among the men the background has the opposite effect: 64 percent of young men without a migrant background consider sexual fidelity an absolute necessity, while the same is only true for 56 % of those with a migrant background.

Regardless of the level of education, sexual fidelity plays a very important role for women. When it comes to the men's responses, however, there is a clear impact of education: for men with a more basic level of education, sexual fidelity in a relationship is also indispensable, but at a comparatively lower level at 49 percent.

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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/>