

» Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration

Sexuality Education, the First Period and the First Ejaculation

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 provides an overview of the state of sexuality education and of the onset of sexual maturity markers among adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 in Germany. In addition, it examines to what extent there is a need for more information surrounding the topic of sexuality. Young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 are also heard.

The focal issue of this fact sheet lies on sexual maturity markers, specifically the onset of periods (menarche) and the first ejaculation; further changes, such as a change in vocal pitch and pubic hair (Kahl, Schaffrath Rosario & Schlaud, 2007) are not discussed further.

Results: An Overview		Page
1	Eight in ten adolescents feel sexually educated.	2
2	The level of sexuality education is correlated with age, socio-cultural background and sexuality education received in school.	3
3	Maturity marker: girls are experiencing their first period at an increasingly younger age.	6
4	Male respondents expressed more surprise about the arrival of sexual maturity than female respondents.	9
5	There is much interest in further information on the subject of sexuality.	11
6	The long-term trend shows: the sexuality education measures of the recent decades are bearing fruit.	14

Result 1

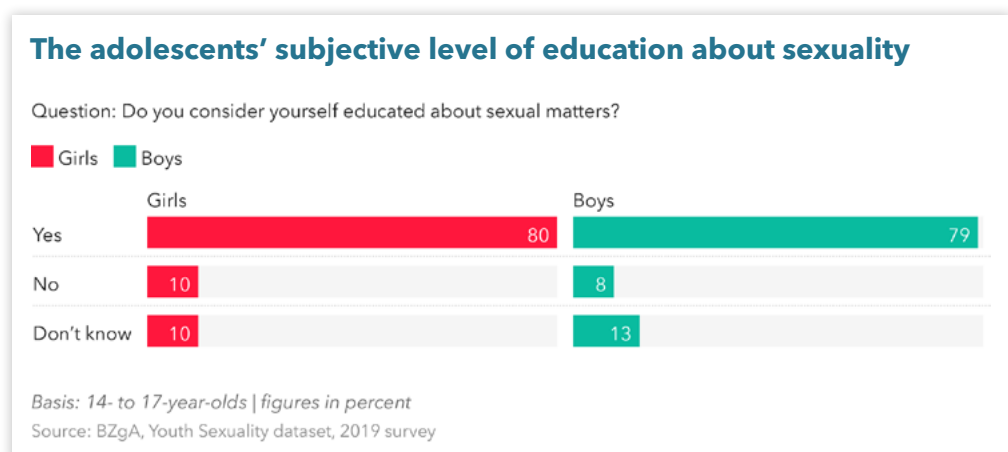
Eight in ten adolescents feel sexually educated.

This ninth trend survey on youth sexuality has found that the vast majority of the 14- to 17-year-old adolescents consider themselves educated about sexual matters. The majority of the respondents said yes to the question 'Do you consider yourself educated about sexual matters?' The figures are very similar for the girls and boys in this current survey - 80 and 79 percent respectively (see Figure 1). The trend comparison also shows a relatively constant progression for both the girls and the boys when it comes to them assessing their own level of knowledge about sexuality education topics.

Since 2005, the figures measured for the girls have been between 77 and 84 percent, and between 72 and 83 percent for the boys. Although the lowest figures for both the girls and the boys have come from the earliest survey year of 2005, it is not straightforwardly possible to deduce a clearly rising trend line here.

For adolescents with German citizenship the survey data goes back even further: according to these figures 79 percent of the girls and 75 percent of the boys with German citizenship felt they were educated about topics to do with sexuality in 1980. Therefore, the comparatively low figures from 2005 are to be interpreted as outliers.

Figure 1



The level of sexuality education is correlated with age, socio-cultural background and sexuality education received in school.

For the 14- to 17-year-old adolescents in Germany, there are a variety of socio-demographic factors that are in play when it comes to their subjective assessment of their own level of education about topics to do with sexuality. Alongside biological age, these include their socio-cultural background and education.

Attribute: age

The adolescents' self-assessment about their level of sexuality education changes with age:

- Among the 14-year-olds only two in three said they felt educated about sexual matters (64 %).
- Among the 17-year-olds on the other hand, 91 percent said they felt educated about sexual matters.

It also holds true that those adolescents who are already sexually active themselves are generally more likely to believe they are well informed (94 %). Equally, the respondents between the ages of 14 and 17 who were in a steady relationship were also almost universally of the view that they were educated about sexual matters (95 %).

Attributes: socio-cultural background and education

Other factors indicate educational gaps among adolescents outside of the developments that occur with age. In particular, these are socio-cultural background and education.

Adolescents with a migrant background were generally much less likely to consider themselves educated about sexual matters (72 % compared to 83 %). Girls of the Muslim faith in particular were far less likely to say that they felt educated about sexual topics compared to their peers of different religious persuasions (63 % compared to all others, from 81 % without a religion to 85 % among those of the Protestant faith).

[See Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration - Fact Sheet 'In Focus: Becoming Sexually Active'](#)



There is an additional factor that influences boys and girls in their assessment of their own level of education about sexual topics: their academic level of education. The higher their level of education, the higher also the likelihood that they subjectively class themselves as being educated on sexual matters (see Table 1).

Table 1

	Girls	Boys
Total	80	79
<i>Migrant background</i>		
No	85	80
Yes	70	75
<i>Religion</i>		
Protestant	85	80
Catholic	83	82
Muslim	63	71
No religion	81	78
<i>(desired) educational qualifications</i>		
Basic (Hauptschule or similar)	73	70
Moderate (mittlere Reife or similar)	79	78
High (Abitur or similar)	83	83

Basis: 14- to 17-year-olds | figures in percent
 Source: BZgA, Youth Sexuality dataset, 2019 survey

The educational effect has a particularly noticeable impact among the boys with a migrant background:

- Those that have or are seeking a high level of education (Abitur or similar in Germany) are as likely as the boys without a migrant background to report that they consider themselves informed on sexual matters (both 83 %)
- Among those with a basic level of education (Hauptschule or similar in Germany), the percentage who feel sexually educated is quite a bit lower for those with a migrant background compared to those without a migrant background (65 % versus 75 %)

Among the girls from families with a migrant history on the other hand the academic factor does not play any major role (depending on level of education 68 % to 74 %).

Attributes: school and the home

Regardless of these sociodemographic differences, the positive influence of sexuality education in school must be emphasised. Those who received such classes in school are much more likely to consider themselves educated about sexual topics than those who did not receive sexuality education classes at school (81 % compared to 66 %).

The home can have a similarly positive effect: if there is an atmosphere in the home that allows open conversation about sexuality, that is more likely to lead to a positive self-assessment (87 % versus 67 %). The same is true for contraceptive topics: if the adolescents are able to talk to their parents about contraception, 87 percent say they are educated about sexual topics (compared to 68 %).

[See Youth Sexuality
9th Iteration – Fact Sheet
'Sexuality Education at
School'](#)



Result 3

Maturity marker: girls are experiencing their first period at an increasingly younger age.

In addition to questions about the subjective assessment of sexuality education, the 9th Iteration of the representative survey on Youth Sexuality also takes a closer look at the topic of physical sexual maturity markers, specifically the first period (menarche) and the first ejaculation.

Female maturity marker

The first period as a marker of sexual maturity tends to come early these days for most of the female adolescents:

- One in two girls between the ages of 14 and 17 had their first period by 12 years old at the latest (52%)
- By age 13 a full 84 percent of the girls have had their first period
- Only 12 percent of the girls were 14 or older when they had their first period

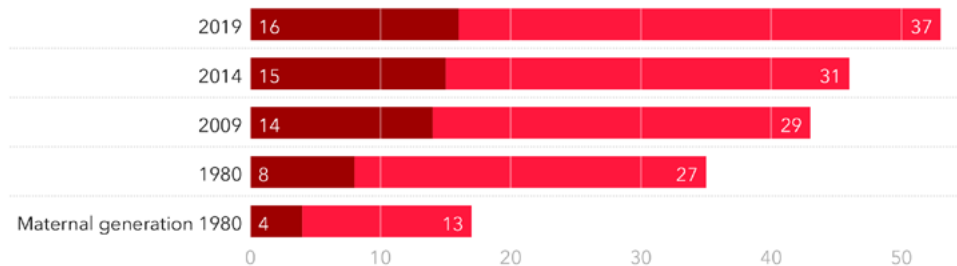
It is the exception that the first period has not yet occurred in this age range (3% of the 14- to 17-year-old girls).

The long-term trend for girls with German citizenship or without a migrant background emphasises that the age at which they experienced their first period over the past four decades has shifted towards a younger and younger age (see Figure 2).

Early onset of menstruation among girls (long-term trend)

Question: How old were you when you had your first period?

■ 11 years old or younger ■ 12 years old



Basis: 14- to 17-year-old girls with German citizenship / from 2014: without a migrant background and for 1980: mothers of the 14- to 17-year-old girls | figures in percent

Source: BZgA, Youth Sexuality dataset, 1980, 2009, 2014 and 2019 surveys

Figure 2

While only one in three girls experienced their first period at age 12 or younger in 1980, the same is now true for one in two girls (35 % compared to 53 %). That means that the moment of the first period has been shifting more and more into the girls' childhood phase: the percentage of girls who experienced their first period at age 11 or younger has doubled from 1980 to today, from 8 percent to 16 percent.

If we compare this development with the maternal generation of those who were asked about their first period in 1980 (in 1980 the question about the age at which the first period occurred was not just posed to the girls but also their mothers), we can see that this trend development continues. In 1980, a mere 17 percent of the mothers of the young girls said they had had their first period aged 12 or younger. For their daughters, the percentage had already doubled to 35 percent and 40 years later, the figure for today's girls even triples that of the 1980 maternal generation, at 53 percent.

Male maturity marker

Generally speaking, boys experience their first ejaculation somewhat later than girls experience their first period. The current representative survey found the following results:

- Only a good third of the boys had ejaculated for the first time aged 11 or 12 at the oldest (36 %).
- The majority experienced their first ejaculation at age 13 (31 %), some later than that (23 %).
- 8 percent of the male adolescents up to age 17 said they had not yet ejaculated.

Male respondents expressed more surprise about the arrival of sexual maturity than female respondents.

Regarding how prepared the respondents were for the physical changes connected to sexual maturity, all those who had already experienced their first period or their first ejaculation were asked for information in the ninth survey on Youth Sexuality – meaning both the 14- to 17-year-old adolescents for whom this was true and the 18- to 25-year-old young adults.

The results demonstrate that the girls and young women felt substantially better prepared for their first period than the boys and young men did for their first ejaculation. The male respondents were almost twice as likely to be surprised by their first ejaculation as the female respondents of the same age were about their first period (“I was completely unprepared”: 13 % compared to 7 %).

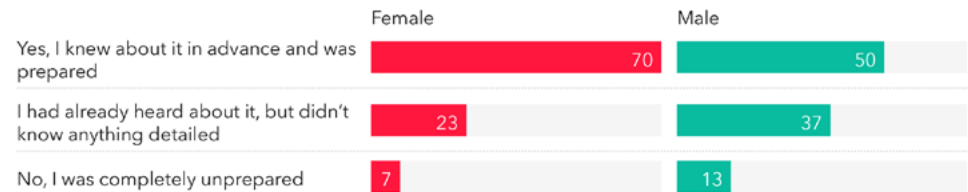
Furthermore, seven in ten girls and young women said they were sufficiently prepared for their first period (“I knew about it in advance”). Among the boys and young men only one in two was prepared for the first ejaculation (see Figure 3). This clear difference between the sexes of 20 percentage points could already be seen in 2014, when adolescents and young adults up to and including the age of 25 were asked (21 percentage points at the time).

Figure 3

Level of preparedness for the first period / first ejaculation, from the perspective of the adolescents and young adults

Question: If you think back to when you had your first period / when you had your first wanted or unwanted ejaculation: were you prepared for it?

■ Female ■ Male



Basis: 14- to 25-year-olds who have already had their first period / first ejaculation | figures in percent
Source: BZgA, Youth Sexuality dataset, 2019 survey

[See Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration - Fact Sheet 'Sexuality Education and Contraceptive Advice at Home'](#)



When it comes to the preparedness for physical changes associated with sexual maturity, there are basically the same influencing factors as for sexuality education generally (see Result 2):

- Adolescents and young adults with a migrant background, the Muslim faith and those who a basic level of education were more likely to report knowledge deficits.
- The same is true for those respondents without access to sexuality education in school and those who do not think they are able to talk openly about sexuality and/or contraception in the home.

There is much interest in further information on the subject of sexuality.

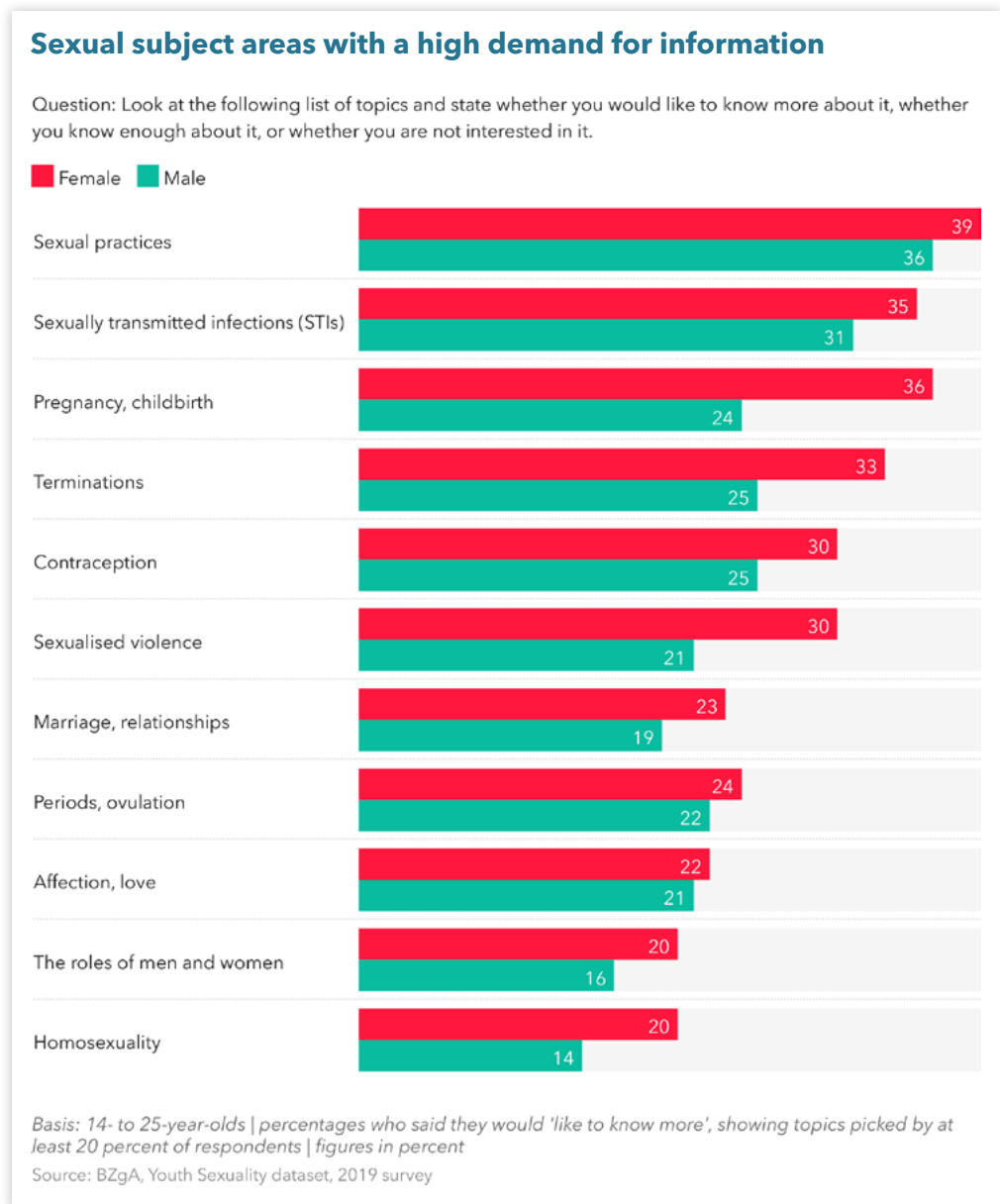
Even though eight in ten adolescents report feeling sufficiently educated about sexual matters and the figure among the young adults should be at least as high, the youth sexuality trend survey captures that there are unanswered questions about the subject of sexuality at this age.

The respondents were asked about their desire for more information with regard to eighteen individual aspects of this subject area. A full 72 percent of the adolescents and young adults reported “wanting to know more” about at least one of these aspects.

- Understandably, the desire for more information was higher for the younger respondents (14- to 17-year-olds: 75 %).
- At 70 percent, the young adults are not far behind in their desire for information.

The percentage of those who consistently say they already know ‘enough’ or, alternatively, are not interested in that particular topic is relatively low, both among the adolescents as well as among the young adults (23 % of the adolescents and 28 % of the young adults).

Figure 4



Sexual practices, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy and childbirth, terminations, contraception and sexualised violence were the topics adolescents and young adults were most interested in (see Figure 4):

- Both sexes have the same level of interest in sexual practices and sexually transmitted infections.

- For other topics - and the topic of pregnancy and childbirth is most noteworthy here - the female respondents reported a much higher level of interest (a difference of 12 percentage points).
- Overall, there was merely one topic, namely pornography, where the male respondents exhibited more interest in knowing more than the female respondents. However, at 16 and 13 percent respectively, neither sex reported this topic as being high up on their priority list.

Being interested in finding out more about sexual topics is dependent on what phase in their life someone is in and therefore on their age. Adolescents aged 14 to 17 are consequently more interested in physical and sexual development than the 18- to 25-year-old young adults (21 % versus 11 %). The younger cohort was also more likely to want to know about love and affection (28 % compared to 19 %) and about the subject of masturbation (26 % versus 13 %).

Contraception is one of the fundamental topics of sexuality education. Every third respondent among the 14- to 17-year-olds (34 %) said they wanted to know more about this, and within this cohort it was primarily the 14 and 15-year-olds (42 %), who are just becoming sexually active. However, one in four young adults would also like to 'know more' about this topic (24 %). Sexualised violence and sexually transmitted infections are also topics that adolescents are interested in along with young adults.

A reverse trend exists for the topic of 'pregnancy and childbirth'. This is a subject girls are interested in from early on and this continues into young adulthood ('would like to know more about it' 14- to 17-year-olds: 36 %; 18- to 25-year-olds: 36 %). The male adolescents on the other hand tend to discover the subject later, as young men, when they feel potential paternity is closer and they start to confront the topic (14- to 17-year-olds: 20 %; 18- to 25-year-olds: 26 %).

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



Result 6

The long-term trend shows: the sexuality education measures of the recent decades are bearing fruit.

It is also interesting to take a look back at the self-assessment of the need for information made by the respondents from previous representative surveys. For adolescents between 14 and 17 with German citizenship or without a migrant background the trend analysis on Youth Sexuality allows for a long-term trend comparison. Figures 5 and 6 show what topics to do with sexuality young people today would like to know more about, compared to young people four decades ago.

Figure 5

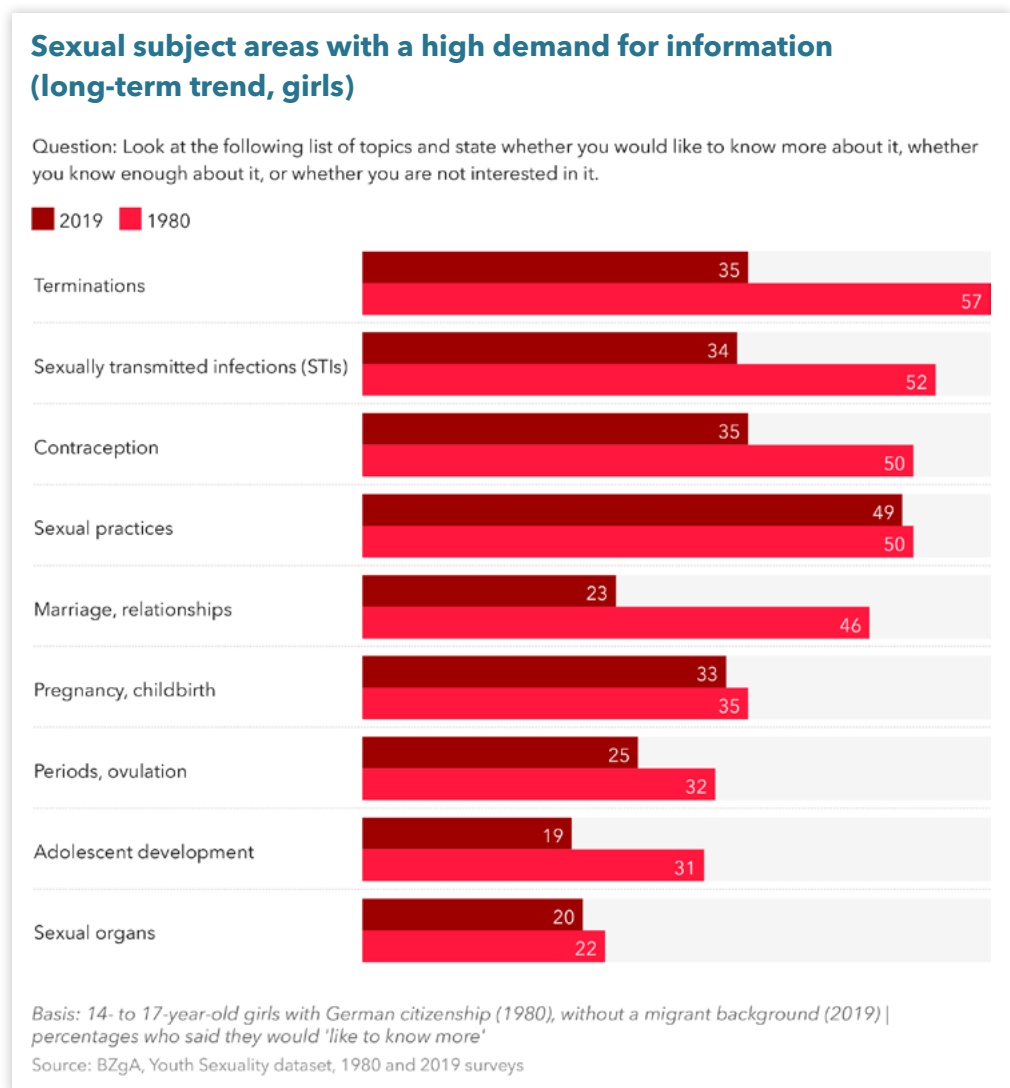
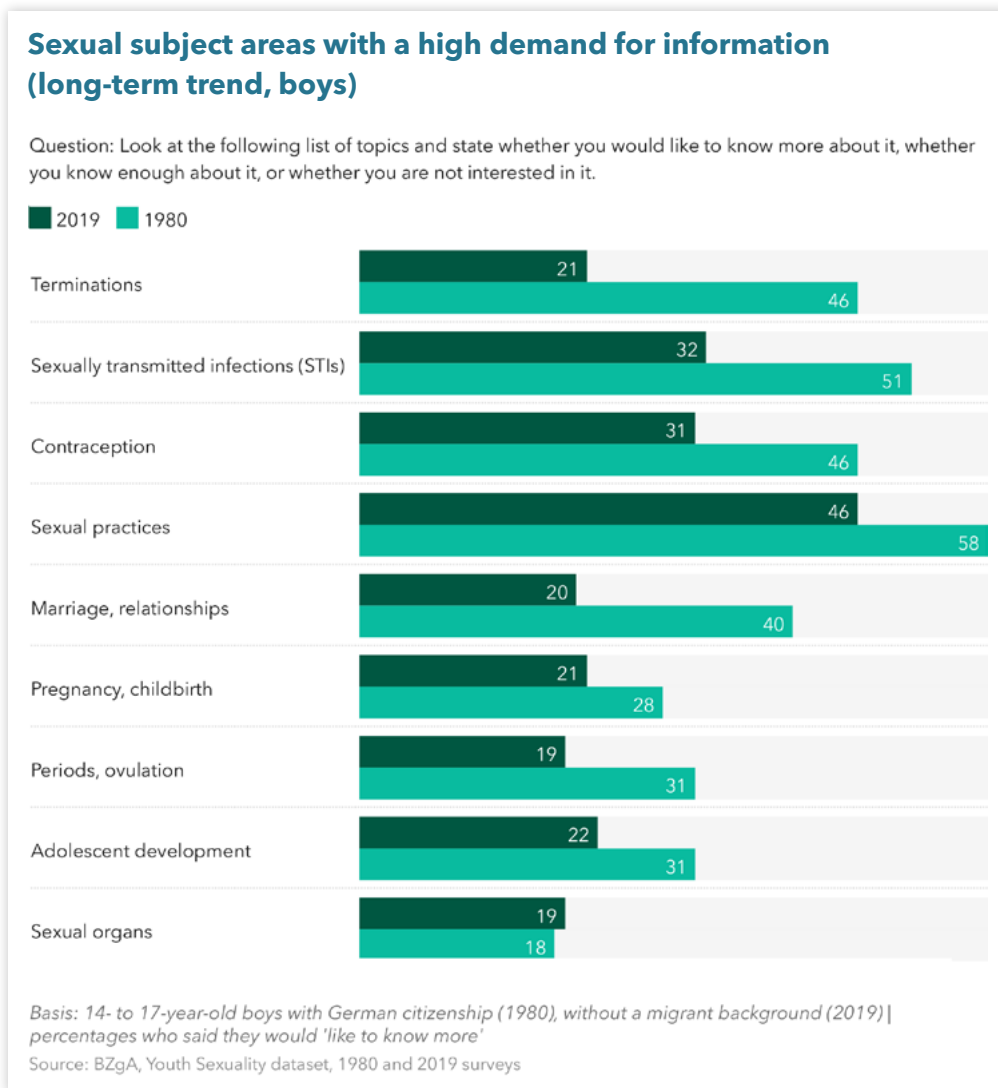


Figure 6



At first glance it might appear that young people in 1980 were more interested in the various topics than the respondents in 2019. For all the topics where a comparison with today's results is possible, the percentages for which the girls and boys said they 'would like to know more' have decreased substantially.

This result is largely down to a higher (subjective) level of knowledge among the current young generation and in no way reflects an increased indifference or decreased interest: for almost all subject areas in the current survey the adolescents were much more likely than 40 years ago to say they 'already knew enough', which is in part down to the sexuality education efforts of the last few decades.

Nevertheless, there are some subject areas where the desire for information is similarly high today as it was then:

- These include information about male and female sex organs. Just as in 1980, around one fifth of the respondents wanted to know more about this subject, even though it is (almost) always addressed during sexuality education classes in school.
- The girls have just as great a need for information on two topics as in 1980: sexual practices (1980: 50 %; 2019: 49 %) and pregnancy and childbirth (35 % compared to 33 %).
- Today, the boys are comparably interested in the topic of sexual practices as the girls (46 % compared to 49 %) but in 1980 they expressed interest in this subject much more often (58 % compared to 50 %).

Contraception, sexually transmitted infections and terminations are also topics for which one in two adolescents expressed uncertainty at the start of the eighties. That is no longer the case: for example, for the topic of contraception the need for information has dropped by 15 percentage points for both the girls and the boys since then.

Terminations as well as marriage and other forms of relationships are the two topics that exhibit particularly significant changes over the roughly 40 years:

- These days only around one in three girls (35 %) and one in five boys (21 %) between the ages of 14 and 17 do not feel sufficiently informed about the topic of terminating a pregnancy. In 1980 these figures were 57 percent for the girls and 46 percent for the boys, which is a reduction of 22 percentage points (girls) and 25 percentage points (boys) respectively.
- It is a very similar situation when it comes to the level of knowledge and the need for information surrounding the subject of marriage and other forms of relationships. In 1980, 46 percent of the girls and 40 percent of the boys did not feel sufficiently informed on this topic. The corresponding long-term trend figures show a reduction of 23 and 20 percentage points respectively, to 23 percent for the girls and 20 percent of the boys.

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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/>