

## » Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration

# Sexual Experiences in Adolescence

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.

The sexual experiences of young people are frequently the topic of public debate, especially with regard to their age. This fact sheet presents the core results about sexual experiences from the perspective of the sexually active adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25 in Germany. There are regular comparisons between the different age groups and if the underlying data allow, the results also discuss both heterosexual and homosexual encounters.

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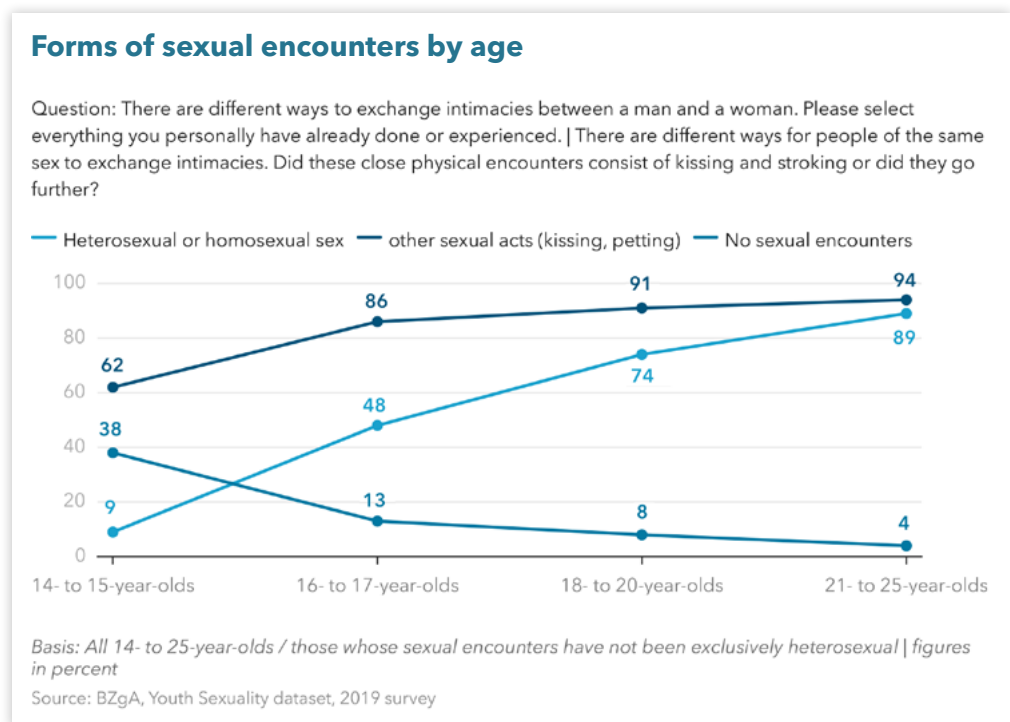
Result 1

## The majority of 17-year-olds are sexually active.

Most people have their first physical encounters and sexual experiences during their teenage years. The data from the ninth Youth Sexuality survey shows that enormous developmental advances take place between the ages of 14 and 19. Among the 14-year-olds almost one in two respondents have had no sexual experiences of any kind yet (47%), regardless of whether this is heterosexual or homosexual, the same is only true for just 6 percent of the 19-year-olds.

The best way to understand when young people become sexually active is to look at the survey's entire age span from 14 to 25. Figure 1 depicts the different forms of sexual encounters by age. Heterosexual and homosexual encounters are looked at together.

Figure 1



The figures show that at age 14 and 15 the majority of the adolescent have had their first sexual experiences (62 %), be that kissing, stroking/touching breasts/genitals. By age 16 and 17 all of the sexual acts that precede sexual intercourse have been experienced/performed by the majority of the adolescents. There are no noteworthy differences between the sexes here.

Only a minority of young people is under the age of 17 when they have sexual intercourse for the first time. Among the 16-year-olds only one in three (35 %) said they had already had sexual intercourse. With increasing age sexual activity increases significantly: among the 17 and 18-year-olds 62 % - and therefore the majority - have already had sex. From age 22 onwards around nine in ten of the young adults said they were sexually active.

For the vast majority of the adolescents and young adults exclusively heterosexual encounters are relevant: nine in ten of the girls and young women between the ages of 14 and 25 said their orientation was heterosexual (89 %) and the same was true for 93 percent of the boys and young men.

## Result 2

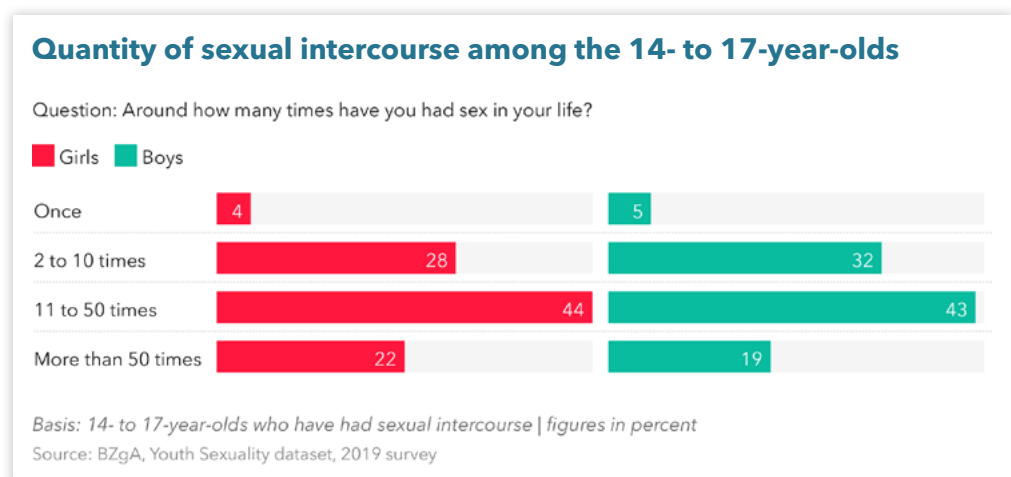
## There are almost no differences between the sexes anymore with regard to adolescent sexual experiences.

The data from the ninth survey reveals to what extent there are differences between the sexes with regard to sexual experiences: the experiences of the girls and boys between the ages of 14 and 17 exhibit almost no differences (see Figure 2).

- 27 percent of the girls and 30 percent of the boys reported having had heterosexual intercourse before.
- Only for a small percentage of them has this remained a one-time experience to date (5%).
- Most of the adolescents said they had had sex more than ten times or more (64%) and 21 percent said they had had sex more than fifty times.

This data on the quantity of sexual intercourse is only available for heterosexual intercourse.

Figure 2



The differences between the sexes are just a few percentage points in every case:

- 66 percent of the girls said they had had sexual intercourse more than ten times.
- 62 percent of the boys said they had had sexual intercourse more than ten times.

The image that is still widespread, namely that girls are on average younger than their male counterparts when they have their first sexual encounters, is therefore not true anymore.

This was still different a good five years ago: during the previous survey from 2014, the more girls overall had had sexual experiences than the boys of the same age (75 % compared to 63 % more than ten times). A convergence has therefore taken place here.

The presence of a steady relationship is a significant influencing factor regarding how the adolescents gather sexual experiences - alongside age and the question of how old they were when they first had sex. If there is a steady partner, the 14- to 17-year-olds are much more likely to say they have had sex more than ten times (70 %), than when there is no steady partner (55 %).

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



Result 3

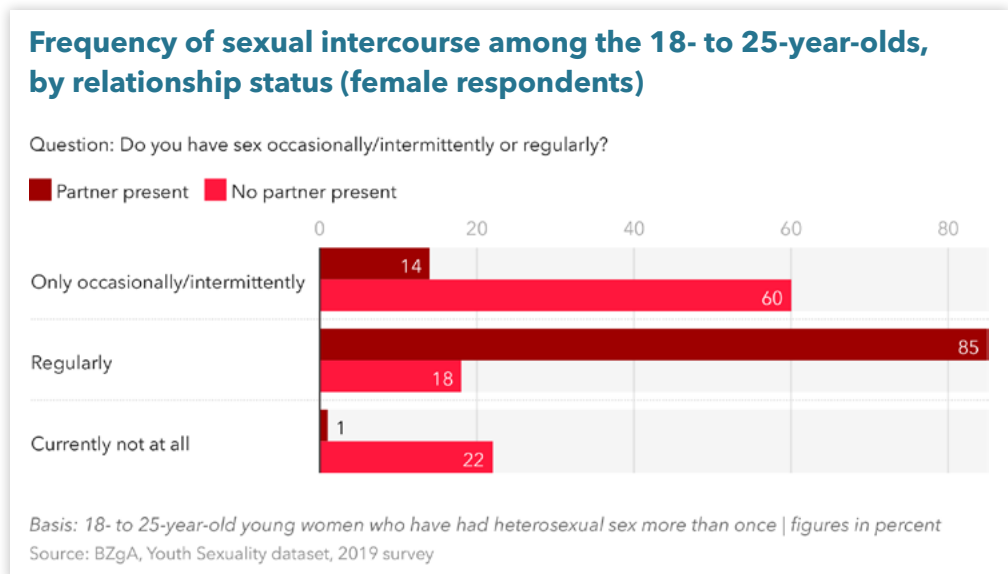
## Regular sex is particularly common in steady relationships.

Some of the young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 can look back at a decade of sexual activity. The question about the frequency of sexual intercourse provides insight into what role sexual activities play in the lives of young adults. Here too heterosexual encounters are the focus. The data from the ninth iteration of the survey on youth sexuality reveals that the vast majority of the 18- to 25-year-olds are sexually active (82%). Among the adults who are sexually active, 60 percent said they had had sexual intercourse more than 50 times to date.

If the respondents said they had had sex more than once, they were also asked about the current frequency of their sexual encounters.

- According to the results, 54 percent have sex regularly.
- However, a significant proportion – 38 percent – said they only occasionally or intermittently engaged in sexual activities.
- 8 percent said that at the time of the survey they had not yet had any sexual intercourse.

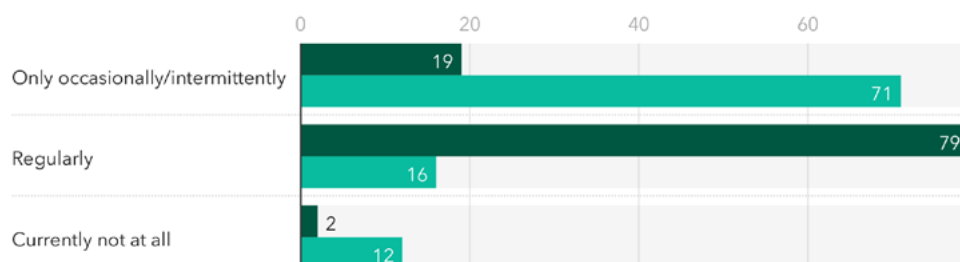
Figure 3



## Frequency of sexual intercourse among the 18- to 25-year-olds, by relationship status (male respondents)

Question: Do you have sex occasionally/intermittently or regularly?

■ Partner present ■ No partner present



Basis: 18- to 25-year-old young men who have had heterosexual sex more than once | figures in percent  
Source: BZgA, Youth Sexuality dataset, 2019 survey

Figure 4

To what extent a regular sex life exists depends significantly on whether the young adults are in a steady relationship or not (see Figures 3 and 4).

- For the young adults who are in a steady relationship, regular sex is part of that relationship in most cases (young women: 85 %, young men: 79 %).
- If there is no steady relationship, a regular sex life exists only for a small minority of the respondents (young women: 18 %, young men: 16 %).

The majority of the young adults without a partner only have sex occasionally. The figures vary by sex: 60 percent of the young women gave this response versus 71 percent of the young men. The reason for this is that the sex lives of young women who are not in a relationship are more likely to come to a complete halt (22 % compared to 12 % among the young men).

[See Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration - Fact Sheet 'Relationships'](#)



## Result 4

## Girls and young women are more reserved about switching sexual partners (male and female).

Regarding the number of sexual partners, we can say the following about the adolescents (under the age of 18) in this ninth survey on Youth Sexuality:

- Around half of the 14- to 17-year-old sexually active girls have only had one sexual partner to date (46 %, see Figure 5).
- That figure is slightly lower for the boys, at 38 percent (see Figure 6).

This question looks at both heterosexual and homosexual encounters. Among the boys, more have had more than three partners since their first time (18 compared to 13 among the girls) – however, this is the exception for both sexes among the adolescents.

It does not tend to remain with these experiences in the first years of an active sex life. From 18 onwards the number of sexual partners increases significantly:

- Comparing the 16- to 17-year-olds and the 18- to 20-year-olds, the percentage of respondents who have had more than three sexual partners increases to more than double (15 % compared to 34 %).
- If there is a further age comparison between the 18- to 20-year-olds and the 21- to 25-year-olds, the percentage grows substantially again (by 17 percentage points to 51 %).

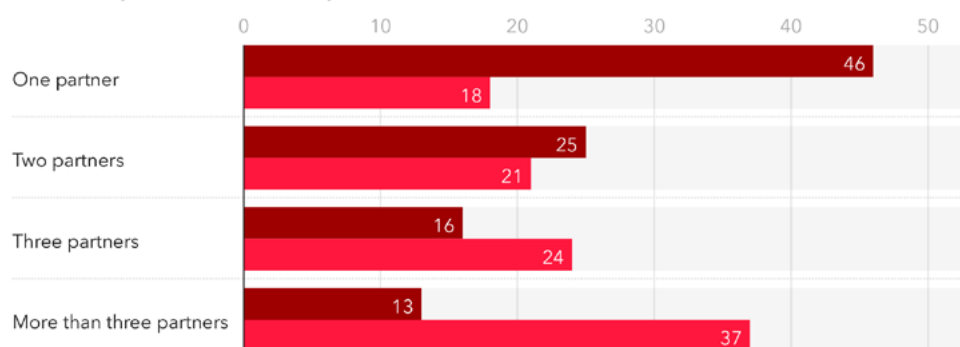


Overall, young men between 18 and 25 present as much more active compared to their female peers regarding changing partners (53% of the men compared to 37% of the women with more than three sexual partners).

## Number of sexual partners to date by age (female respondents)

Question: With how many partners have you had sex in your life so far?

■ 14- to 17-year-olds ■ 18- to 25-year-olds



Basis: 14- to 25-year-old young women who have had more than one heterosexual or homosexual intercourse encounter | figures in percent

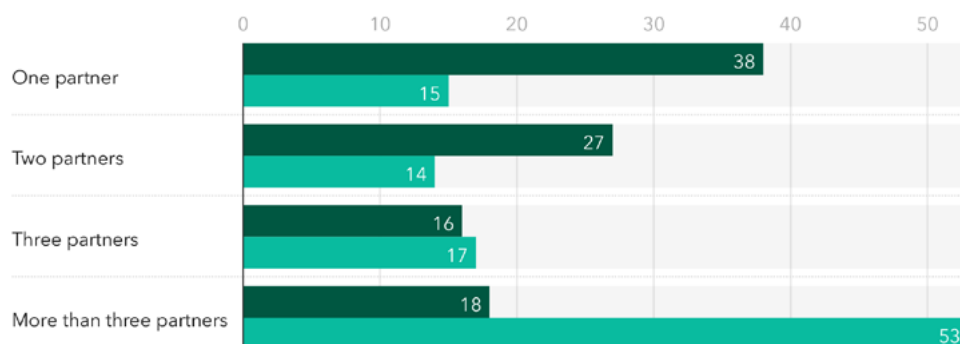
Source: BZgA, Youth Sexuality dataset, 2019 survey

Figure 5

## Number of sexual partners to date by age (male respondents)

Question: With how many partners have you had sex in your life so far?

■ 14- to 17-year-olds ■ 18- to 25-year-olds



Basis: 14- to 25-year-old young men who have had more than one heterosexual or homosexual intercourse encounter | figures in percent

Source: BZgA, Youth Sexuality dataset, 2019 survey

Figure 6

Both among the under-18s and the young adults we can observe a more restrained attitude with regard to the number of sexual partners than among the boys and young men.

In the trend comparison to previous survey from 2014 we can still see a trend towards more frequent changes of partners, especially for the 14- to 17-year-old girls. For example, the number of sexually active girls in this age group who have only had one sexual partner to date has dropped by eight percentage points and by five percentage points among the boys. Both in 2014 and 2019 it was true that more boys than girls had had sex with more than three partners; however, the differences have lessened (18% boys compared to 13% girls; 2014: 20% compared to 11% respectively).

## Young men masturbate more often and from a younger age than young women.

Result 5

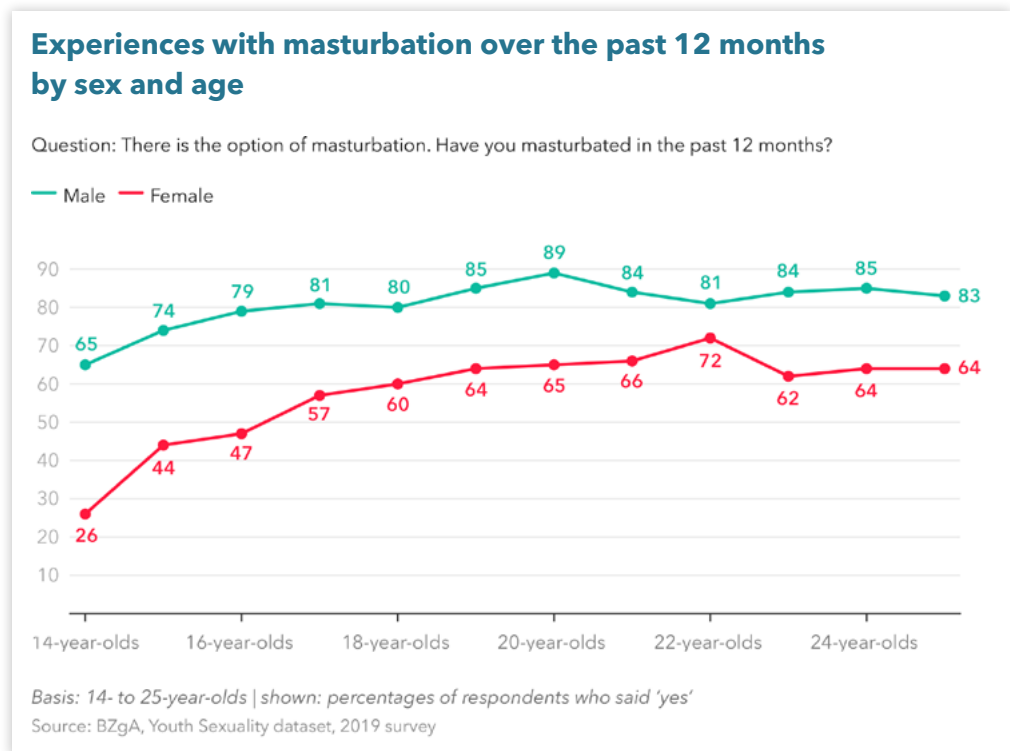
The adolescents do not just gather sexual experiences with another person; they also engage with their own, changing body. Among the sexual urges directed at the own body is masturbation, an auto-sexual activity.

The male respondents of all ages engage in masturbation substantially more often than do their female peers - and they also start earlier.

Two in three of the boys aged 14 have masturbated in the past twelve months and among the 15-year-olds the figure even rises to three in four. This activity increases steadily for the boys, until it reaches a high point at age 20. At that age nine in ten young men have had current experience with masturbation in the past twelve months (89 %).

The female respondents only reach the level of activity of the 14-year-old boys when they are more than 20 years old. Among the 14-year-old girls just one in four masturbate. This increases substantially, however, with increasing years. There is a particularly marked increase between the 14 and 15-year-old girls by 18 percentage points (see Figure 7).

Figure 7



The experiences with masturbation are not equally as widespread among all groups of young people between the ages of 14 and 25. They differ based on other characteristics such as educational qualifications, religious affiliation, experience with sexual intercourse and sexual orientation.

- Young men and women with a high (desired) level of education are more likely to report experiences with masturbation than those with lower levels of education (75% compared to 65% at a moderate level and 62% at a basic (desired) level of education).

- Young people of the Muslim faith are less likely to report experiences with masturbation than young people with a Protestant or Catholic affiliation or with no religion (56 % compared to 72 % for a different or no religious affiliation). Among the girls and young women this difference is even more pronounced: here, 33 percent of the respondents of the Muslim faith said they had had experience with masturbation (compared to 61 % and 62 % among the girls/young women with a different or no religion).
- Adolescents and young adults, both male and female, between the ages of 14 and 25 who have had sexual intercourse before are also more likely to report having experience with masturbation than young people who have not yet experienced their first time (77 % compared to 57 % without sexual intercourse experience). An exception here is the cohort of boys under the age of 18: this group has reported similar levels of experience with masturbation: 75 percent among those with sexual intercourse experience compared to 73 percent without.
- Young women between the ages of 18 and 25 who report a bisexual orientation or a sexual orientation towards the same sex are much more likely to report having had experience with masturbation than the young women with a heterosexual orientation (87 % compared to 61 %). This difference does not exist among the men. 2 percent of the girls and young women said they had a homosexual orientation. A further 8 percent said they were bisexual and 1 percent was undecided or gave no information. Among the boys and young men 3 percent said they were homosexual and a further 3 percent said bisexual. Here too 1 percent said they were not decided or did not give a response.

## Result 6

## Experiences with masturbation have increased substantially among girls in particular.

If we now look not just at the current survey but at the long-term trend, we can see the following for the 14- to 17-year-olds: the long-term trend covering almost 40 years reveals an increase in the amount of masturbation, especially among the girls without a migrant background.

The depiction of the trend regarding whether the adolescents have had experience with masturbation in the past twelve months rests on four data points. There is a reason for this: data on the topic of masturbation experience was gathered in 1980. However, the question about masturbation was not asked in every survey; instead, it was asked alternately with other questions.

Although the results of this trend analysis confirm that there are still significant sex differences when it comes to masturbation, the girls have recently caught up with the boys quite substantially following only moderate increases between 1980 and 2014:

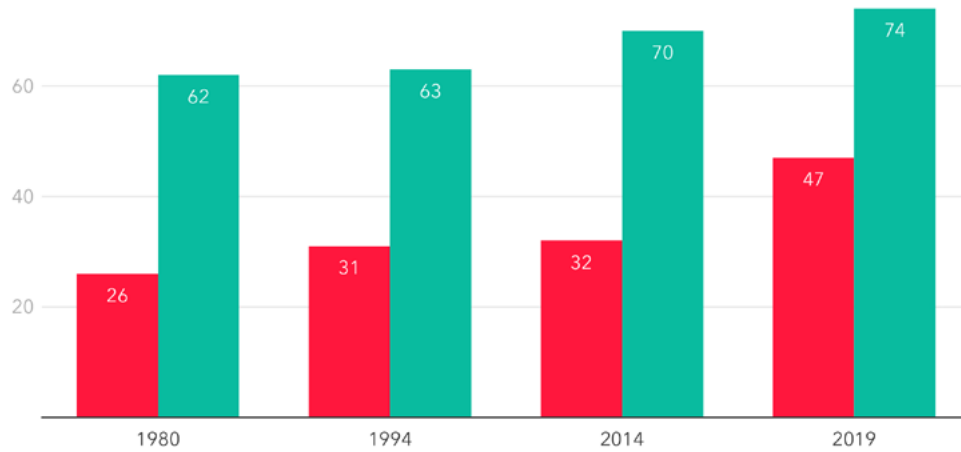
- The figure for girls who have had experience with masturbation has gone up by 15 percentage points in the last five years, making the current figure almost double that of what it was in the 1980 survey.
- Among the boys there was a fairly notable increase of 7 percentage points earlier, between 1994 and 2014 and a further increase of 4 points took place between 2014 and 2019.

Overall, this is the highest level of masturbation that has been measured to date in the past 40 years (see Figure 8).

### Experiences with masturbation in the past twelve months (long-term trend)

Question: There is the option of masturbation. Have you masturbated in the past 12 months?

Female Male



Basis: 14- to 17-year-olds with German citizenship / from 2014: without a migrant background | yes-responses shown in percent

Source: BZgA, Youth Sexuality dataset, 1980, 1994, 2014 and 2019 surveys

Figure 8



## References

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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

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- 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.



## Imprint

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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

|                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <b>Client</b>                 | Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)   |
| <b>Project lead</b>           | Angelika Hessling, BZgA  |
| <b>Survey institute</b>       | Kantar GmbH  |
| <b>Survey population</b>      | Adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25   |
| <b>Survey method</b>          | 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. |
| <b>Selection method</b>       | A disproportionately selected quota sample with regards to sex, age and migrant background   |
| <b>Sample of young people</b> | 6,032 interviews<br>of which 3,556 were with adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 and 2,476 with young adults between 18 and 25   |
| <b>Sample: parents</b>        | In the households of the 14- to 17-year-old adolescents without a migrant background one parent was also surveyed (2,422 interviews)   |
| <b>Weighting</b>              | All the data shown underwent a representative weighting in order to remove the sample's disproportionalities caused by the design.   |
| <b>Survey period</b>          | 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/>