

Young people's experiences of unwanted sex: findings from the 2021 Secondary Schools and Sexual Health Survey

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Background:

The Australian government recently introduced compulsory 'consent' education into the Australian school curriculum, in part to address high rates of sexual violence in the Australian community. In this presentation we look at experiences of unwanted sex among young people in order to improve understanding of the frequency and context in which this occurs.

Methods:

We analyzed data from an Australian online sexual health survey of 14-18-year-olds conducted in 2021 (n=6,841). Here we present findings related to experiences of unwanted sex and help seeking related to sexual violence. Pearson's Chi-squared analyses were used to compare differences between genders and sexual orientation.

Results:

There were 3,659 (54%) participants who reported past experiences of sex. Of these, 1525 (42%; 22.3% of total sample) had experienced unwanted sex in their lifetime. Young women and non-binary people were more likely than young men to report having experienced unwanted sex ($p < .001$). LGBQ people were more likely than heterosexual people to report having experienced unwanted sex ($p < .001$). The average age at which participants had first experienced unwanted sex was 14.9 years and it most commonly occurred in the context of a romantic relationship, with 87% (n=1298) reporting their most recent experience of forced sex was perpetrated by a male. Verbal pressure was cited as contributing to unwanted sex by 65% (n=974), while 41% (n=608) were worried about negative outcomes and 32% (n=483) were physically forced to have sex. There were 350 (24%) young people who reported seeking help following unwanted sex. Non-binary people were more likely to seek help ($p < .001$).

Conclusion:

More than 20% of young people in this study had experienced unwanted sex and, for many of these people, this occurred in the context of a romantic relationship. These findings underscore the urgency of school-based sexual consent and respectful relationships education.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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