

SUMMARY

Early 2007 the WODC (the Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Justice) commissioned the Rutgers Nisso Groep (RNG) to investigate the nature, scope and risks of instrumental forms of teenage sex. The primary motivation for these kinds of sexual behaviour does not seem to be the development of a relationship and intimacy, but purely sexual gratification or material gain. Such sexual behaviour includes casual sex, sex in exchange for money or something else, and participating in sex parties or Internet sex. The primary research method employed was a review of the available literature on the subject. Additional data was obtained from a meeting with field experts and from secondary analyses on the data base of a previously conducted, large-scale and representative research among young people between the ages of 12 and 25 (*Sex under 25*). Below are the questions included in this research and a summary of the findings.

1) What is the nature and scope of sexual behaviour of young people that is not focused on the development of a relationship or intimacy, but on sexual gratification or material gain? Is there a higher incidence of such behaviour among specific groups of youth (characterised by demographic characteristics, background or street culture)? In which way and in which contexts does such behaviour come about?

Casual sex among young people is fairly common. Almost one in five sexually active Dutch youth did not have a relationship with the last partner they had sexual intercourse with. Internet sex is not uncommon either: about one in ten boys and one in twenty girls say they have experienced cyber sex in the past six months. What they did exactly is unknown; it relates to all behaviours that were mentioned as such by the youth themselves. Sex in exchange for money or another reward appears to occur among a very small minority within the total population of youth, although we do not have Dutch statistics relating to sex parties.

Based on the literature, discussions with experts and secondary analyses, we can distinguish groups in which forms of instrumental sex appear to occur more frequently. Firstly, this behaviour appears to occur more frequently in large cities. The secondary analyses show that young people in highly urbanised areas relatively often have sex in exchange for money or sex with casual partners and think more permissively about sex without any emotional involvement. A study in south-east Amsterdam also finds that sex in exchange for a reward and participation in sex parties occurs not infrequently, although another observation is that it exceeds the city (district) boundaries.

With regard to boys, the group between the ages of 12 and 14 appears to have a more positive attitude towards forms of instrumental sex: their last partner was more often a casual partner, they think more positively about sex without being emotionally involved and relatively often say that it is alright for a boy to expect sex in certain situations (for example, if a girl has the image of being “easy”). Furthermore, homeless youth and youth with mental problems, e.g. young people who are depressed or addicted, more frequently have sex in exchange for money or another reward. Young people with higher scores on depression more frequently have (negative) experiences with Internet sex. In addition, homosexual boys have had experiences with casual partners, paid sex and Internet sex relatively often.

Associations with educational level and ethnic background show conflicting results. Based on the secondary analyses, low-educated youth and boys from a Moroccan or Turkish background appear to engage relatively often in commercial sex or Internet sex. In the

meeting of experts held as a result of the quickscan in south-east Amsterdam it was also stated that most girls engaging in commercial sex were lower educated. However, there are also studies of forms of instrumental sex that did not find any disparities with regard to ethnicity or educational level. Possibly ethnicity and education are not so much the determining factors, but rather social-economic status and (connected to this) a problematic family situation.

A warm family situation (in which parents show affection, give support whenever it is needed and are well-informed about their children's life) appears to be linked to less experience with the various forms of instrumental sex. In the secondary analyses, negative correlations were found between such a family background and paid sex, Internet sex and sex with casual partners. In the literature various indications were found as well that a problematic family situation increases the likelihood of engaging in instrumental sex. The field experts confirmed this connection based on their own practical experience.

2) How do young people experience these kinds of sexual behaviour? To what extent are such contacts voluntary or involuntary? Is such behaviour experienced differently within specific subgroups?

This question can not really be answered as a result of the present study, partly because most available research is of a quantitative nature. What we do know, is that most young people have a preference for sex within an intimate relationship. We also know that some young people feel that oral sex is not "sex", that paid sex is not "prostitution", and that some pressure to get sex is not "sexual violence". This is also recognised by the field experts. Where the boundary lies between consensual and non-consensual sex and for which groups is not known. Opinions appear to vary greatly and to be different for boys and girls.

3) Can shifts be observed as to the nature and scope of such behaviour and how it is experienced over the course of the past ten years?

Field experts clearly observe shifts. Young people appear to engage in sexual behaviour at a much younger age, they go much further in sexual contacts (girls used to kiss to get attention, now they give blow jobs) and the place where they talk about sex or experiment with it has changed (it used to be the bicycle shed, now it is on the Internet). Figures from the KLPD (National Police Services Agency) show that the number of reports of sexual offences via the Internet has strongly increased in the past few years.

The literature partially confirms such shifts in sexual behaviour and sexual morals. However, the shifts are small: in 1995 the age at which half of the youth experienced sexual intercourse was 17.7; in 2005 it was 17.3. The increase in the percentage of youth with sexual experience is found in particular among the older group of teenagers (from the age of 15) and less so among youth between the ages of 12 and 14. Sexual behaviour on the Internet has unarguably increased, simply because the use of the Internet by young people has increased explosively in the past ten years. It is unknown to what extent sex in exchange for money or another reward and participation in sex parties have increased in the past ten years. Not much is known either about shifts in how sexuality is experienced. Compared to ten years ago, young people nowadays do think more permissively about sex without emotional involvement. In 1995 one in six schoolboys and schoolgirls felt this is all right; in 2005 this figure had increased to one in four.

4) Does such behaviour and perception associate with experience with sexual abuse or violence and any other risks?

There is no hard evidence for a correlation between experience with forms of instrumental sex or the perception thereof and experience with sexual violence. However, there are various indications that suggest a connection. For example, there is abundant evidence that young people who have had sex at some point in exchange for money or another reward also more often experienced sexual violence. Due to the correlational character of such connections the experiences with paid sex could possibly be a reaction to sexual abuse. Literature has frequently shown that sexual abuse in childhood is connected with sexually acting out behaviour during adolescence.

Specific risks are attached to sexual behaviour on the Internet, which possibly increase the chance of sexual violence. For example, on the Internet it is always possible to make a recording when someone shows some kind of sexual behaviour in front of a webcam. In this way the other gets hold of material with which (s)he can exert pressure to obtain more or increasingly explicit images of sexual acts. Furthermore, risks are attached to dating via the Internet. It is very well possible that someone presents him/herself very differently from who (s)he really is and that on a date (s)he turns out to be an adult instead of a peer.

Finally, theory and empiric evidence show that previous experiences with instrumental sex (or the assumption thereof) sometimes make it harder to refuse such contacts in the future, in particular for girls. When girls have at some point participated in instrumental sexual activities voluntarily, it is sometimes expected or even demanded from them that they will do this again, or with others. It requires much more tenacity from these girls to refuse to repeat sexual acts than from girls who have never engaged in them before. Field experts in the area of sexual offences indicate as well that offenders sooner project their own responsibility onto the victim when it is (assumed) common knowledge that she would readily perform certain sexual acts. They then claim that the girl 'wanted it too'.

5) Which role do television, the Internet and mobile phones play in these forms of sexual behaviour?

There has been a strong increase in images of (instrumental) sex on television in the past few years. Furthermore, the Internet offers numerous new possibilities in the area of sex, in terms of coming into contact with erotic material as well as interactions of a sexual nature. Both theoretically and intuitively the assumption can be made that the confrontation with images of a sexual nature has its impact. There is no empirical evidence that this development is connected with instrumental sexual behaviour among teenagers, with changing sexual attitudes or with the incidence of sexual coercion among youth. However, there are several indications that it does.

For example, it appears that young people who often watch sexualised media more often have experience with sexual intercourse and have their first sexual experiences at a younger age. Young people who watch sex programmes on television more often than average, become sexually active 9 to 17 months earlier than young people who watch such programmes less often. In addition, a higher consumption of sexuality in the media is connected with a higher assessment of the sexual experience of peers and more gender stereotyped opinions. The more young people, especially girls, watch sexualised images in the media, the more preoccupied and the less satisfied they become with their looks. In this context a connection with sexual

violence is conceivable, as a correlation is often also found between such experiences and a negative self image. In addition, for boys, associations have been found between the use of music videos and the Internet and the expectation they will not respect boundaries.

When studying the effects of media use, it is of importance to look at certain protective and risk factors. The influence of sexual images in the media is not the same for all youth. They are not passive receivers, but select certain images themselves, watch them with more or less attention and interpret them in different ways. For example, watching (violent) porn appears to be exclusively connected to violent sexual behaviour in men who already are inclined to it. Furthermore, the connection between watching sexual images and more sexual behaviour and more permissive attitudes is stronger in young people who indicate that they positively evaluate the images in the media or find them realistic. Parents could play a mediating role in this respect, for example by placing the images in the media in a more realistic perspective in conversations with their children or by talking with their child about what (s)he is doing and experiencing on the Internet. For example, young people who indicate that their parents interfere more often in their use of the media, think less permissively about a number of forms of instrumental sex. Young people who say they often talk with their parents about what they are doing on the Internet, have fewer negative experiences on the Internet.

6) What is known about the reaction of the police and social care to sexual violence that might occur in these forms of sexual behaviour, and is there any effective prevention of these situations of sexual violence?

As mentioned before, it is not clear to what extent instrumental sex is harmful or non-consensual and therefore it is not clear to what extent prevention is required. When prevention would be desirable, parents could play a part. They could do so by trying to be informed about their children's lives, by showing affection and by being there for them whenever it is needed. They could also teach their children to question the media, rather than absorb it uncritically. Parents could watch television together with their children, discuss what they see and, if deemed necessary, impose restrictions with regard to programmes that are unsuitable for children's viewing in their eyes.

Social care and police can only do something when help is requested or an offence is reported. This does not happen frequently with regard to the forms of teenage sex that are the focus of this research. When there is a case of obvious sexual violence or prostitution, it sometimes does happen. In such cases the intervention by social care and the police is often considered inadequate. Both are insufficiently geared towards the youth's perception of their environment. Care is fragmented and in some municipalities almost non-existent. Furthermore, hardly anything is known about effective interventions.

Summing up, it can be stated that changes are taking place in the incidence of sexual images in the media and in the sexual morals and behaviour of young people. Theoretically these changes definitely involve risks, but to what extent this is actually the case, is impossible to say with any degree of certainty. There are indications that the most extreme forms of instrumental sex only occur among a small (vulnerable) group of young people. This group deserves our attention. Adjusting interventions to the changing context of sexual development is a requirement to this end. These interventions should be geared towards the youth's perception of their environment and, more specifically, to the perception of specific target groups, such as young people with a mental disability or young people from specific subcultures.

