



4 TIPS FOR SEXUAL WELL-BEING



CHALLENGE SEXUAL SCRIPTS

Most people are taught that sex just means penis-in-vagina, but that's only one idea of what sex is, and it's shaped by what society says is "normal." Sex can include many different types of sexual acts because all bodies, abilities, and desires are unique! If we understand sex like this, it gets easier to talk about things like consent, staying safe, and making sure it feels good for everyone (Wright et al., 2024).



FOCUS ON SAFETY & PLEASURE

Communication is an important aspect of sex! Focusing on things like feeling good, safe and comfortable during sex may help make people care more about the experience, which could lead to more use of safer sex practices.



SELF ACCEPTANCE

- For queer folks, feeling good about your gender and sexuality can help make sex feel more comfortable, safe, and enjoyable (SIECCAN, 2019).
- Positive body image is linked to sexual well-being, particularly for women (Gillen and Markey, 2019).
- When men lead with things like respect and empathy, sex tends to be better for everyone, and it helps lower the risk of sexualized violence (Abebe et al., 2018; Claussen et al., 2019)



SAFER SEX PRACTICES

Take some time to figure out what safer sex practices make sense for you. What kind(s) of sexual activities do you engage in? What outcomes are you hoping to prevent? Is it important to you to prevent pregnancy, STIs, or both? Your answers to these questions will help determine which practices are best for you!

Continue reading for resources and information about our study!

Sexual Health And the Role of Education

In our study, we examined sexual health literacy among young adults, specifically whether sexual health literacy and access to inclusive education differed between cisgender heterosexual (CH) and sexual and gender minority (SGM) participants.

What is sexual health literacy?

Sexual health literacy refers to knowledge of sexual health information (like biological processes, hygiene, STIs, and safer sex practices), as well as the ability to make informed decisions regarding engagement in safer sex practices, and reproductive and sexual health care (Alhussaini et al., 2025).

What did we want to know?

We wanted to explore four aspects of sexual health:

1. Experiences with school-based sexual health education
2. Sexual health literacy
3. Sources of sexual health information
4. Engagement in safer sex practices (like using condoms and STI testing)

What did we do?

We asked 913 participants aged 16 to 24 years old to complete a short survey asking questions about demographics, and the above four aspects of sexual health.

- 43% identified as SGM
- 57% identified as CH

Definitions

Cisgender: Someone who identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth

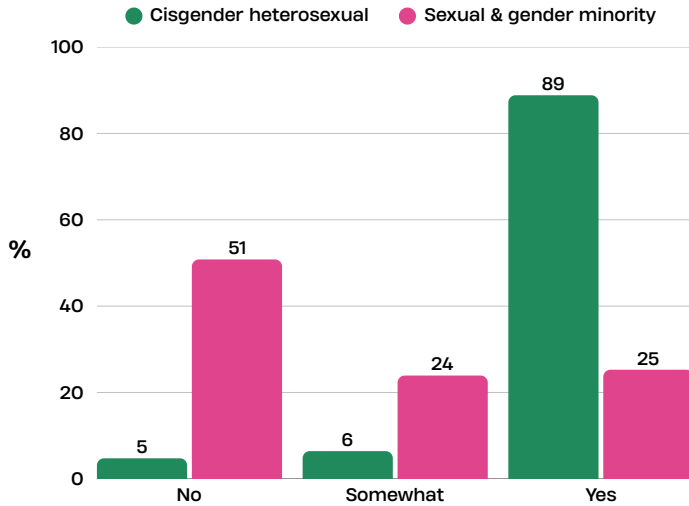
CH: Cisgender heterosexual

SGM: Sexual and gender minority, anyone who is not straight/heterosexual or cisgender (sometimes called 2SLGBTQIA+ or “queer”)

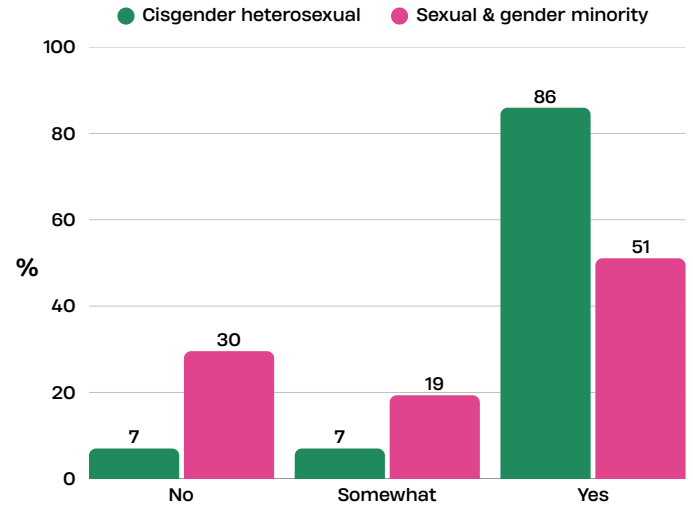


Statistics from our study

Was the sex ed you received relevant to and inclusive of your sexual orientation?



Was the sex ed you received relevant to and inclusive of your gender identity?



What exactly is “sex”?

When we talk about “sex”, many people immediately think of penis-in-vagina sex. However, “sex” can be anything people do for sexual pleasure, whether that involves genitals, hands, mouths, and/or toys.

Of the participants in our study who have had sex:

- 77% had used hands/fingers for penile stimulation
- 76% had used hands/fingers for vulva/clitoral/vaginal stimulation
- 76% had given or received oral sex with a penis
- 74% had engaged in penile-vaginal sex
- 58% had given or received oral sex with a vulva/clitoris/vagina
- 48% had used a sex toy for clitoral/vaginal stimulation
- 25% had used hands/fingers anal stimulation
- 22% had penile-anal sex
- 18% had given or received oral sex with an anus
- 13% had used a sex toy for anal stimulation



Safer Sex Practices

Which safer sex practice(s) you choose to use can depend on the kinds of sex you engage in, and whether you are trying to prevent pregnancy, STIs, or both!

- **Barriers** (like external condoms, internal condoms, dental dams, and gloves) can help protect against STIs and pregnancy
- **Contraception** (like IUDs, the pill, the patch, and the implant) can be used by people with a uterus to help protect against pregnancy
- **PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) and PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis)** are medications that can help prevent the spread of HIV
- **STI testing** can help prevent the spread of STIs

STI testing

Sexually transmitted infections, or STIs, are any kind of infection that you can get from sexual activity. Some STIs are asymptomatic so regular STI testing is an important aspect of practicing safer sex.

STI testing is an effective way to protect yourself and your partner(s) from sexually transmitted infections (like chlamydia, syphilis, and gonorrhea). You can get tested for STIs at many different health clinics (walk-in clinics, sexual health clinics, university health clinics). Testing can involve blood tests, swabs, urine tests, and visual exams. For more information, visit [Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights' STI Testing Guide](#), and [STI Testing FAQ's](#).

When we asked participants how often they get tested for STIs before/after each new sexual partner:

- Always: 19% of SGM, and 16% of CH
- Usually: 19% of SGM, and 15% of CH
- Rarely: 10% of SGM, and 15% of CH
- Never: 50% of SGM, and 50% of CH
- Do not want to answer: 2% of SGM, and 4% of CH

Consent is another important safer sex practice!

Consent is permission for something to happen. It can be sexual or non-sexual (like asking a friend for a hug). F.R.I.E.S. is a helpful acronym for understanding consent. Consent should be:

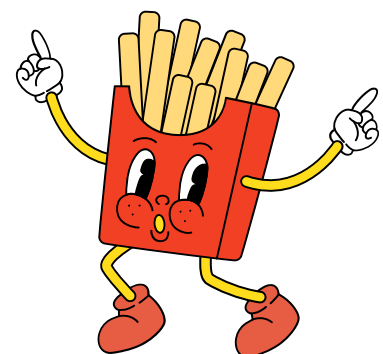
Freely given

Reversible

Informed

Enthusiastic

Specific



Resources

Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights is an organization committed to advancing and upholding sexual and reproductive health and rights in Canada. They have information and resources on their website, as well as a toll-free, confidential phone and text line which is available for questions about sexual health, pregnancy options, abortion, and safer sex. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link: www.actioncanadashr.org

You can access their phone line directly by calling 1-888-642-2725, or by texting 613-800-6757.

Foundry Kelowna is a wellness centre where young people aged 12-24 can access services (virtual, phone & in-person) related to mental and physical health, including sexual health and gender affirming care. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link:

<https://foundrybc.ca/kelowna/>

Hope for Wellness Helpline is available to all Indigenous people across Canada. Experienced and culturally competent counsellors are reachable by telephone and online 'chat' 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can access their helpline directly by calling 1-855-242-3310. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca>

Options for Sexual Health is a sexual health clinic located in Vancouver, BC. They operate Sex Sense, a free, pro-choice, sex-positive, and confidential phone line offering information and resources on sex, sexuality, and sexual health, for people living in British Columbia and the Yukon. You can access Sex Sense directly by calling 1-800-739-7367. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link: <https://www.optionsforsexualhealth.org/sex-sense/>

This Space Belongs to You provides free mental health support for 2S/LGBTQIA+ and/or IBPOC youth in the Okanagan including individual counselling, group programming, and gender affirming wear. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link:

<https://www.thisspacebelongstoyou.com/>

Trans Lifeline is an American non-profit organization, they have a Canadian hotline. They offer a peer support phone service run by trans people for their trans and questioning peers. You can access the hotline directly by calling 1-877-330-6366. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link: www.translifeline.org

Resources for UBC Okanagan students

If you attend UBCO, there are on-campus resources available to you! If you are a student at a different college or university, look into what resources they might have. And, if you are not a student, there are still plenty of resources available to you (some of which are listed above)!

Health & Wellness at UBCO provides counselling and mental health services to students. In addition to offering counselling services, their site provides a comprehensive list of mental health resources available to students. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link:

<https://students.ok.ubc.ca/health-wellness/counselling-mental-health/>

The Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response Office (SVPRO) at UBCO is a confidential place for those who have been impacted by any form of sexual or gender-based violence, harassment, or harm, regardless of where or when it took place. SVPRO aims to be a safer space for all UBC students, faculty, and staff by respecting each person's unique and multiple identities and experiences. All genders and sexualities are welcome. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link: <https://svpro.ok.ubc.ca/>

The SUO Sex Positivity Centre (SPC) at UBCO aims to provide inclusive peer support and resources on topics, such as sexual health, sexual assault, and sexual expression. They seek to increase awareness of campus and community resources about sexual health and overall well-being. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link: <https://www.suo.ca/resource/suo-sex-positivity-centre/#cpt-form>

The UBCO Campus Walk-In Psychological Clinic offers free, low barrier mental health support through brief single-session therapy appointments. This service is available to students, faculty, staff, and community members across British Columbia (age 18+). Sessions are provided by graduate student clinicians (Master's and PhD level) under the supervision of registered psychologists. Support is available for concerns like stress, anxiety, depression, relationships, self-care, and substance use. In-person walk-in sessions are offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am to 3pm, from September to June. Virtual appointments can be booked in advance by emailing ipc.ok@ubc.ca. You can access these resources and learn more about them at this link:

<https://psych.ok.ubc.ca/psychology-clinic/walk-in-wellness/>

Trustworthy websites for more information on sexual health

www.OptionsForSexualHealth.org/facts/ has information on sexually transmitted infections (STIs), sex, birth control, emergency contraception, pregnancy, abortion, gender, and pleasure.

www.Scarleteen.com Created by Heather Corinna, the author of “S.E.X. the all-you-need-to-know-sexuality guide to get you through your teens and twenties,” boasts itself as “the largest resource online wholly dedicated to providing truly comprehensive and highly inclusive sex and relationships education, information and support that centers young people.”

Citations

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EMOTION DYNAMICS LAB

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