Thrills and Spills: Young people’s sexual behaviour and attitudes in seaside and rural areas

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Teenage Pregnancy Strategy

- High rates in England and Wales in comparison to other OECD countries
- Reduction of under 18 conception rates by 2010
- Complexity of issue acknowledged
- Rates reducing but ‘hot spots’ remain - teenage pregnancy culturally embedded in some locales
- Top-down strategy
Living on the Edge (LOTE)

- Commissioned by TPU
- Concern about under-18 conception rates in seaside resorts
- Undertaken 2001 – 2004
-Captured views of wide cross-section of young people
Methodology

- 3 research sites - seaside resorts + rural hinterlands
- 63 gendered groups with 341 secondary school pupils
- 10 groups and 30 interviews with young people not in mainstream schooling and transient young people
- 46 interviews with young parents
- 40 interviews with key professionals
Involving Young People in Research

- Young People's Advisory Groups in all research sites

- Co/peer research
The Seaside Carnival

Seaside resorts characterised by:

- an atmosphere of hedonism and detachment - suspension of reality
- transience - regular flows of holidaymakers, visitors and seasonal workers
- availability of alcohol - lifts inhibitions, reduces capacity to plan and manage use of contraception
No-consequence sex

There’s more people around in the summer
‘Cos in the Winter most people don’t go out and its boring.
And then in the summer there’s loads of lads
And you get loads of lads coming out of clubs late at night and stuff, drunk.
And you don’t know them and you like them and--- whatever---and then they’re gone. Like you think oh they’re here forever and that they’ll come and see you and stuff and they never do. (Year 10 girls)

‘Cos you can like screw them and then just
You don’t see them again
You just hope they don’t get pregnant. (Year 10 boys)
The Thrill of ‘the Moment’

In the heat of the moment you totally forget about the diseases and everything.
(Transient male aged 16)

When you are in a passionate moment. I mean I’ve been there where a guy hasn’t wanted to put on a condom and I’ll say, ‘I’ll get the morning after pill’, because it would kind of ruin the moment.
(Girl aged 16 – 17)
Role of Alcohol

It’s the heat of the moment most of the time . . . Because they’re drunk. That’s most people’s excuse for getting pregnant—that they were drunk—‘I didn’t know what I was doing’. ‘Cos it’s a seaside town—holiday makers coming over for a good time—locals going out and one thing leads to another . . . (Young father)

It's always available, it's fun and excitement and it's the drink. The fair, the pier, the arcades, even now I get excited when summer comes ‘cos there are more men, and someone might fancy me. Holiday romances! Stable relationships are not so important nowadays.

(Youth Advisory Group participant, female)
Alcohol in Rural Areas

Yeah, you can go into [pub’s name], they don’t care, [it’s] full of people younger than me and I don’t even look my age, I think I look younger than what I am and they’re all running around and they’re all sat there with their pints of beer and their vodkas and cokes and everything and they come out, pissed out of their heads and going home with men like 20, 21. It’s a country area and there is not so many adults around. They want to make more money so they’ll let the kids in.

(Girls aged 14 – 15)
Role of Entertainment Industry

- under-age young women used to attract older men into pubs and clubs
- young people function as providers and punters meeting demands of the seaside economy
- employment in industry from an early age can act to limit aspirations
Providers and Punters in the Entertainment Industry

If you’re a girl and smile at the bouncers you get in unless you look like 10.
If you’re wearing something revealing then they’ll let you in.
Easy. The thing is, if you’re attractive then you’re in…
I’ve hardly ever heard of anyone getting stopped for ID if they go clubbing.
Girls get in easier than boys  (Year 10 boys)

You do get into a cycle, you can earn a lot of money in a summer season, long hours and low pay but you do lots of hours, and have 2 or 3 jobs, you get used to earning money from a young age.

(Youth Advisory Group participant, female)
Social risks

Heavily gendered:
If a male is sleeping around it is seen as a good thing—if a girl she is a slut.
(Boy aged 16 – 17)

If a lad slept with like 10 people he’d get a medal, if a girl did, she’d get called a slag. It’s so unfair. (Girl aged 14 – 15)
Health Risks

Perceived as heavily gendered:

Girls are the ones who are at risk. They’re the ones carrying the baby. Yes, we worry about STIs but the girls have got to worry about that and being pregnant, whereas lads haven’t.

(Boys aged 16 – 17)
Reputation in Rural Areas

Loss of reputation heightened by high visibility:

In H [small country town] the clinic we can use is called the 'slag clinic' by everyone. It's called that because of the sort of people who go to it. It's really difficult to get seen in there and it takes ages and you just don't want to be sitting around because it's likely that you'll get seen by someone - you just don't need it. And you get classified as a slag if you're seen in there.

(Year 12 girls)
Accessing sexual health services in rural areas

I know most of the people who work in the doctor's anyway, so I wouldn't go in as they'd tell my mum. I think in some of the shops like the chemist they ask how old you are and everything. It's more embarrassing if you go to a big supermarket and there is big queues and everything. Or if someone you knew worked in there. In the villages everything gets round, doesn't it? (Year 10 girls)

There's the Youth Advice Centre
You wouldn't actually go in there though would you? There's like a big sign saying 'Youth Advice Centre' hanging over it. (Year 12 girls)
Negotiating Use of Condoms

... girls that have condoms on them are labelled slags all the time. They are. I’ve seen it.

(Girl aged 16 – 17)
Managing Risk - Boys

You get condoms from vending machines in sports centres.
Public toilets or pubs.
My hairdresser has some…
Vending machines don’t look at you. There’s no problem with a price check.
You’d be embarrassed in a chemist.
(Year 8 boys)
Managing Risk – Girls 1

When I first went to the clinic, I was told that I've got to go back every week. I'm worried she'll ring home if I don't turn up. I don't trust doctors... (Year 10 girls)

It is like... They've got every excuse to be like judgmental and stuff... But it doesn’t help.

But they have decided to work in the family planning thing, they are going to get young girls coming in there and therefore they really shouldn’t be judgmental. They shouldn’t be working there if they think that.

Basically, you are already feeling bad about having had unprotected sex and scared you could be pregnant, you don’t need someone looking at you all condemning you like that. (Girls 16 – 17)
It's got a lot worse because the doctors where I live has shut down now and I have to go to another and I can't go if I wanted to go on my own. I can't because I can't drive and I can't bike all the way there so I have to tell my mother. Whatever I do I have to tell my mother I'm doing.

(Year 12 girl)

The clinics are never open - they are only open at stupid times. They are only open when you are in school.

(Year 12 girl)

Termination – you wouldn’t even know where to go. It’s not like your mum is telling you where the abortion clinic is, driving you around [seaside town] making sure you know. Or that your university does when you get there.

(Young People’s Advisory Group member, girl)
Collaborations between schools and sexual health services

There is this building next door to school that is offering counselling and stuff, they all need to go to there …
If you've got a problem, you can go in just whenever you want and there is always someone there to talk to you.

(Year 10 boys)

You go at lunch.
You're allowed at lunch, you're actually allowed to go down town for things like that as long as you've got a note …
We go anyway and then if say a teacher does see you down there, you just say 'oh, I'm going to the youth advice centre'.

(Year 10 girls)
Young people, risk and sexual behaviour

- Risks heavily gendered and perceived to be so
- Risk-taking has positive outcomes – excitement of the moment, social status (for boys)
- Negative outcomes concerning social identity as salient as those concerning health
- Risk-taking shaped by local context
- Risk management also gendered and shaped by local context
Messages for sexual health services, education and local planning

- Acknowledge relevance of gender – promote opportunities for young women to control use of contraception
- Recognise role of local context in shaping risk behaviour
- Avoid ‘fear and scare’ tactics – replace with open discussion about sexual behaviour, social identity, and stigma
Thrills and spills

I think in sex education wise they should make us more ... aware as to the good sides as such because people are not being told about that, and they are being told that by their friends – about the good sides - and they want to try it out. If they were told about the good sides and made more aware by the authorities let’s say - well then they wouldn’t be so curious.

They talk about all the diseases that you can get from it, how it will affect your life, your money, all the bad stuff, it’s like they’re trying to scare you and stop you. (Year 10 boys).

If - ‘cos in sex education and stuff they say it’s ... they talk about the worries more, but if they talked about the good side of it and not just the bad, we wouldn’t be sort of not scared ... but worried ... we’ve just got all these negatives ‘cos we’ve never done it – we don’t know positives  (Year 8 boys).
Risk taking and development

Our age is like middle age, you are too young to do this and too old to do that so, instead of going backwards you want to go forwards and you have, it’s not pressure from the outside, it’s pressure from the inside. Like I’ve experienced this myself and I don’t think many people could disagree with me—you want to do it—you want to be seen as older, you want to grow up, so I think it’s like pressure from the inside and that is why like you go out and do these things like go out to clubs when you know you are not legally old enough because you are in the middle and you want to go forward. (Male 16-17)
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Further Information


- Full project report available from: G.Craig@hull.ac.uk