

Sex in Australia 2

The Australian Study of Health and Relationships (ASHR) is our most important study of sexual and reproductive health. Conducted once a decade, it gives a snapshot of the sexual health and well-being of the Australian population. The study provides information essential for the development of policy and the delivery of sexual and reproductive health programs across Australia, and for understanding Australia's sexual culture.

We interviewed 20,094 men and women aged 16–69 between October 2012 and November 2013 using random digit dialling of landline and mobile phones. Computer-assisted interviewing by professional health interviewers tailored the questionnaire to each individual.

Key findings are summarised here. More results will be published in the coming months; please check the ASHR website for details.

First times

- In the sample as a whole, the median (middle) age at first vaginal intercourse was 17
- About 50% of people had had intercourse for the first time when aged 16, 17 or 18
- Although people who were born in the 1940s had first intercourse at a later age than those born in the 1960s and 1970s, there has been no significant decline in the age at first intercourse since the first ASHR survey a decade ago
- Since the first ASHR survey, the proportion of men who had first intercourse before 16 has gone down from 22% to 19%, and the proportion of women who did so has gone up from 13% to 16%
- Men (39%) were more likely than women (19%) to have first intercourse with a casual partner
- The use of protection (condoms or other contraception) at first intercourse has continued to increase. Less than 20% of people used protection at first intercourse during the 1950s, but over 90% did so in the 2000s.
- Experience of oral sex (cunnilingus or fellatio) has become more common. A decade ago, among people aged 16–59, 79% of men and 67% of women had ever had oral sex, but now 88% of men and 86% of women have done so.
- People also experience oral sex earlier. Among people under 20, 21% of men and 17% of women had had oral sex before they had intercourse, but this was true of only 3% of men and women in their 60s

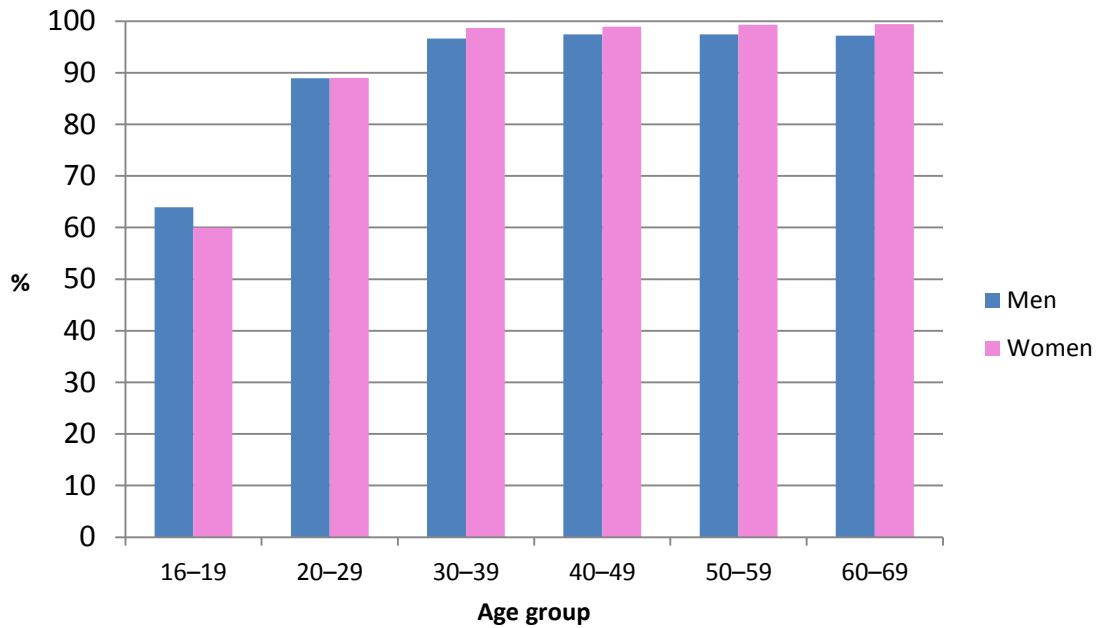
How many partners?

- On average, men said they had had sex (vaginal intercourse, oral sex or manual stimulation) with 18 women

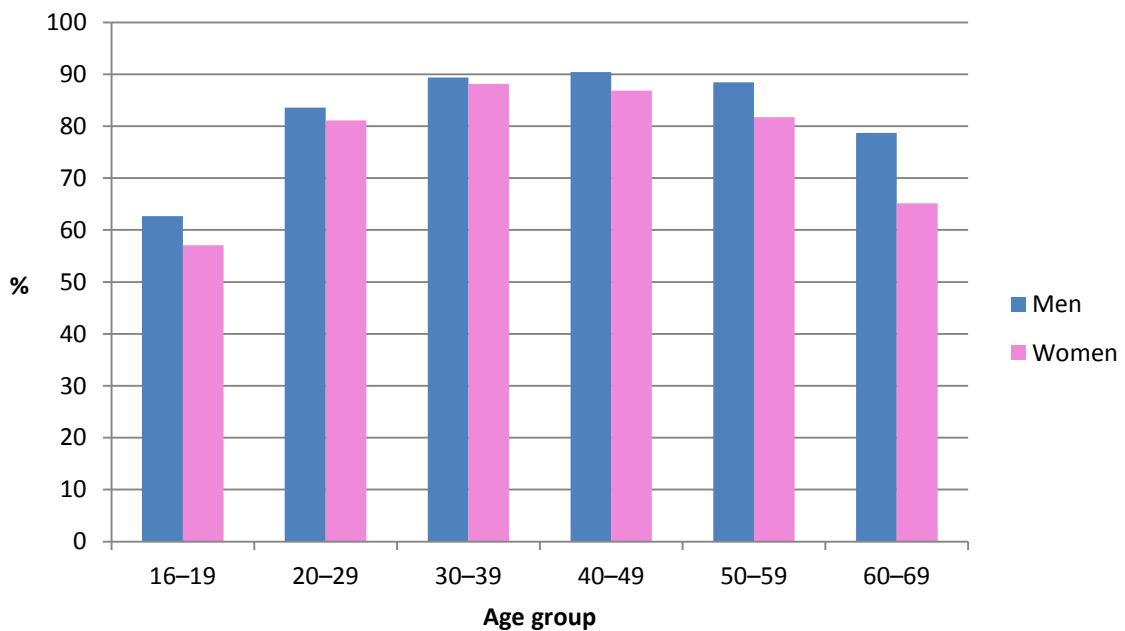
- On average, women said they had had sex (intercourse, oral or manual) with 8 men
- The lifetime number of sexual partners (i.e. anyone they had sex with) reported by women has increased since the first ASHR a decade ago
- Among men in general, the average (mean) number of lifetime male partners was 3, but among gay and bisexual men it was 96, reflecting higher rates of casual sex between men
- Among women in general, the average (mean) number of lifetime female partners was 0.3, but among the lesbian and bisexual women it was 6

Sexual practices

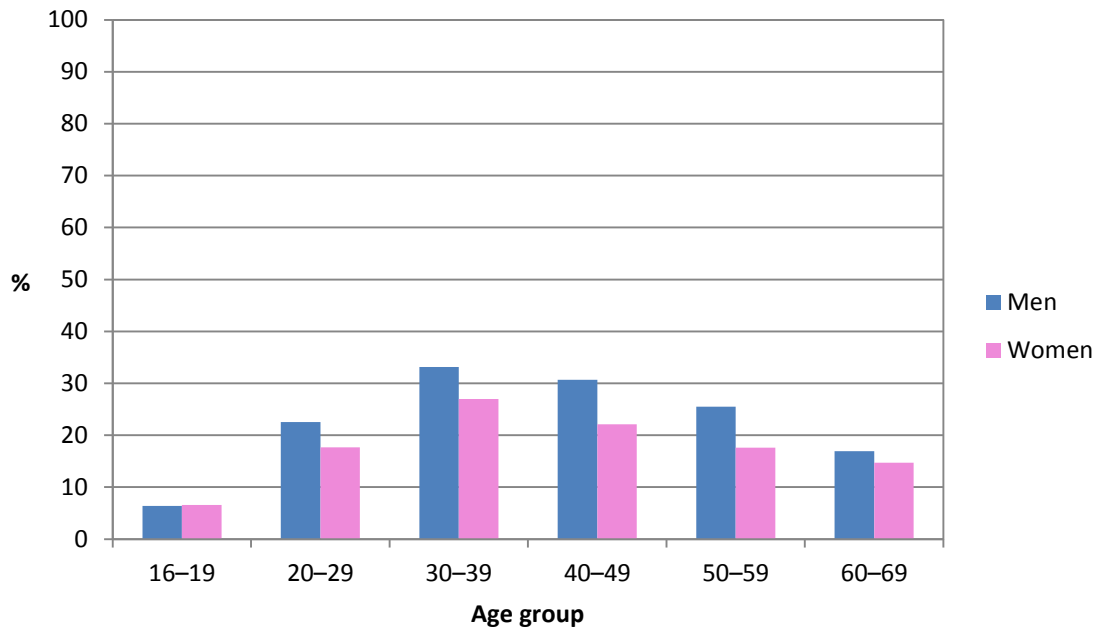
Lifetime experience of vaginal intercourse



Lifetime experience of oral sex



Lifetime experience of anal intercourse



Masturbation

- 72% of men and 42% of women had masturbated in the past year
- Men were more likely than women to have masturbated in the past 4 weeks
- Men who masturbated did so more often (on average 6 times in the past 4 weeks) than women (3 times in the past 4 weeks)

At the most recent sexual encounter

- At the most recent male–female encounter, 73% had sex with a live-in partner, 17% with a regular partner they did not live with, and 8% with a casual or occasional partner
- 94% of people had vaginal intercourse
- 82% of men and 73% of women reported manual stimulation of the woman by the man
- 71% of men and 70% of women reported manual stimulation of the man by the woman
- 31% of men and 23% of women reported cunnilingus (man’s mouth on woman)
- 27% of men and 24 of women reported fellatio (woman’s mouth on man)
- Less than 1% reported anal intercourse
- 92% of men and 66% of women had an orgasm

In the past year

- 63% of men and 20% of women had looked at pornography (print, film or online)
- 15% of men and 21% of women had used a sex toy such as a vibrator or dildo
- 7% of men and 4% of women had used the internet or a phone app to look for partners

In the past year, among those who had had sex with anyone in the past year

- 17% had done or received anal stimulation with the fingers
- 6% had done or received oral anal stimulation (rimming)
- 8% had been involved in role playing or dressing up
- 2% had been involved in BDSM (bondage and discipline, ‘somasochism’ or dominance and submission)

These questions were not asked of anyone who expressed discomfort with the topic.

Sexual relationships and satisfaction

74% of respondents were in a regular (i.e. ongoing) male–female relationship. Among those:

- 84% (62% of the total sample) lived with their partner
- 2% of men and 1% of women had more than one regular partner
- 9% had been together for less than a year, and 34% had been together for more than 20 years

Sex and satisfaction

- 86% of men and 84% of women found their regular heterosexual relationship very or extremely emotionally satisfying
- 88% of men and 76% of women found the sex in the relationship very or extremely physically pleasurable. Among women, 21% said it was not pleasurable, or only moderately, and a further 3% refused to answer.
- On average, people in regular relationships had had sex about 1.4 times a week in the past four weeks. Younger people had sex more often, but even those in their 60s had sex about once a week.
- Frequency of sex in relationships has dropped since the last ASHR survey (1.8 times a week)
- Most people said they would ideally like to have sex about 2–4 times a week

Monogamy

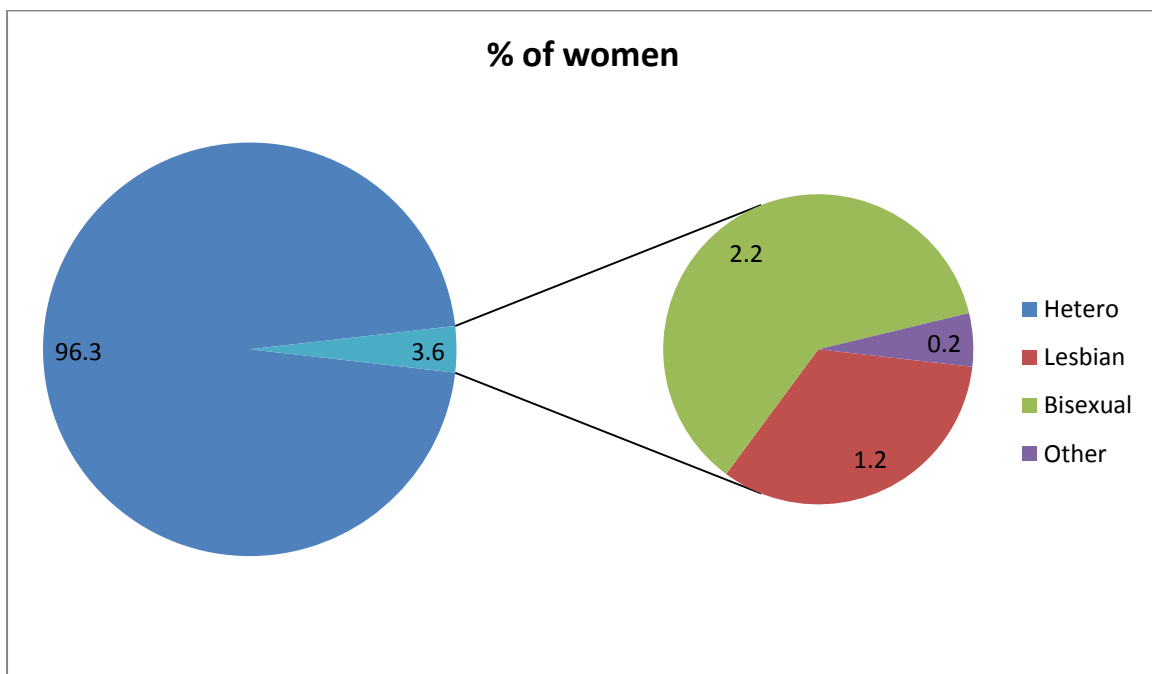
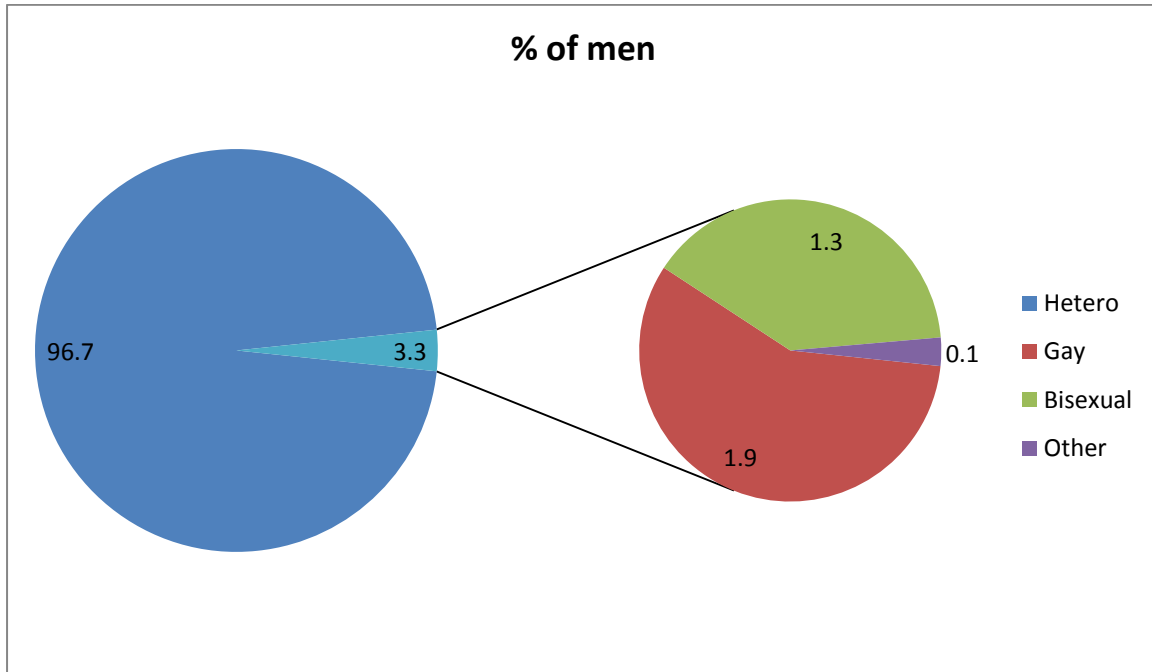
- 96% of people expected that they and their partner would not have sex with anyone else
- 57% of men and 71% of women said they had discussed this with their partner, and almost everyone (97%) of people who discussed this said they had agreed about it
- Among those who had been in the relationship for more than 12 months, about half the small number of people in agreed open relationships had had sex with someone else in the previous year. Of those in agreed monogamous relationships, about 3% of the men and 1% of the women had had sex with someone else

The number of people in same-sex regular relationships was not enough for us to do these analyses.

Sexual identity, experience and attraction

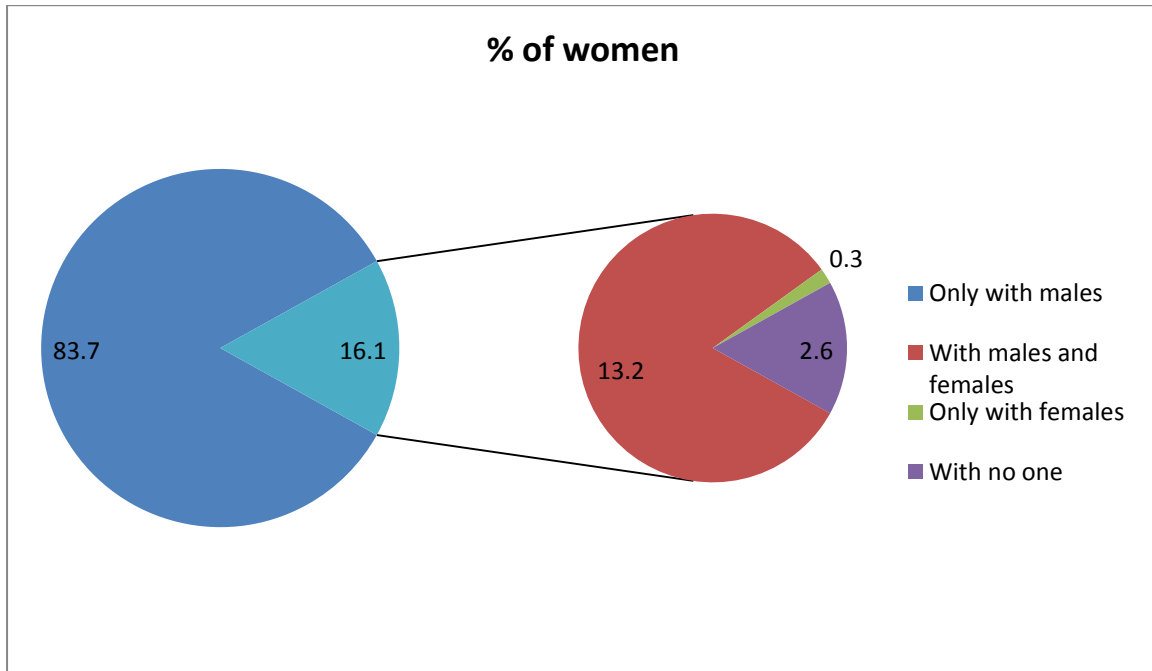
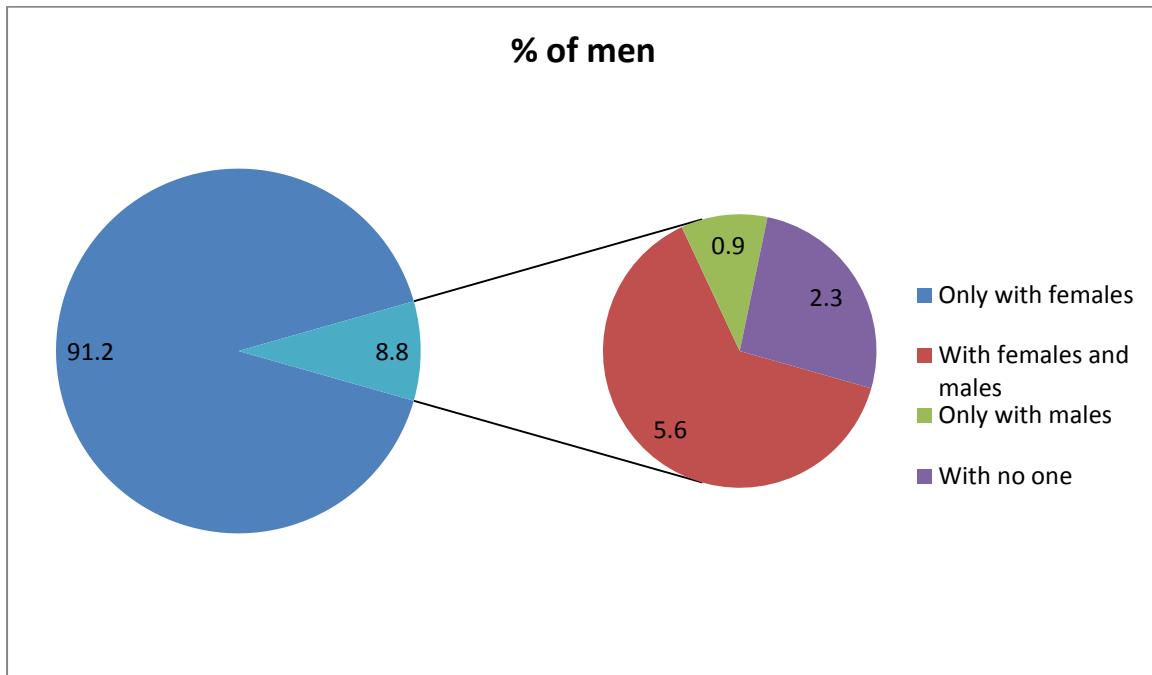
Sexual identity

Asked 'Do you think of yourself as ...?', most people said they were heterosexual or straight.

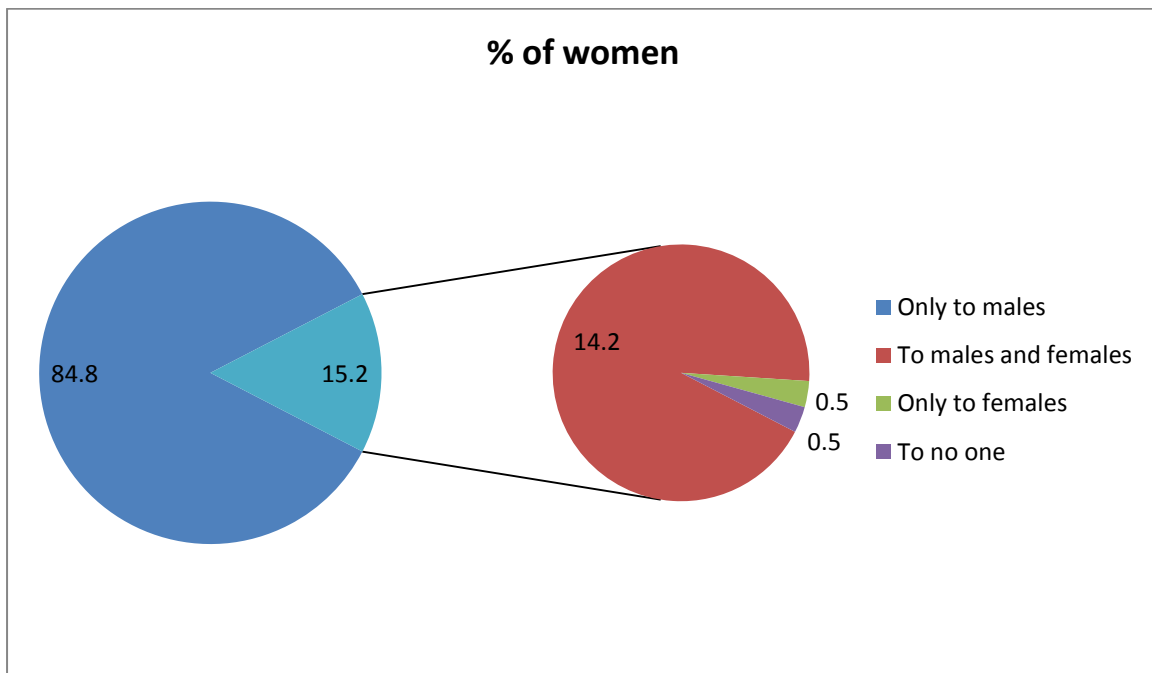
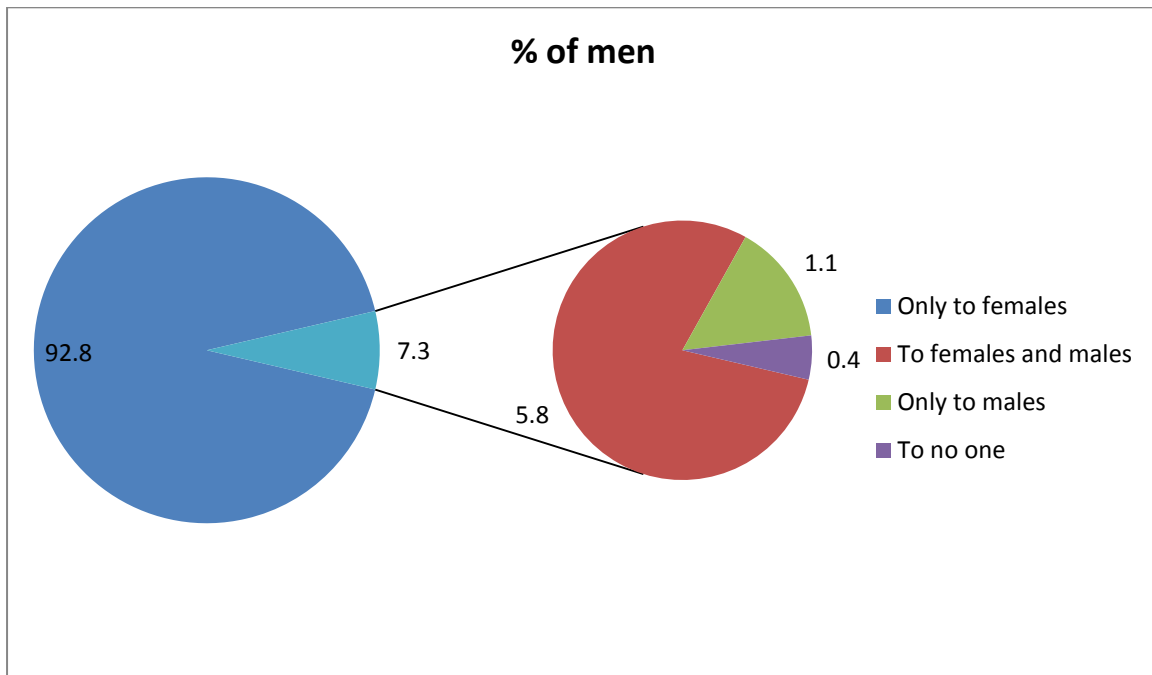


Sexual experience with males and females

However, more people had had some same-sex experience than identify as homosexual or bisexual. Further, there are more people who have had sex with no one than there are people who have had same-sex experience only.



Sexual attraction to males and females

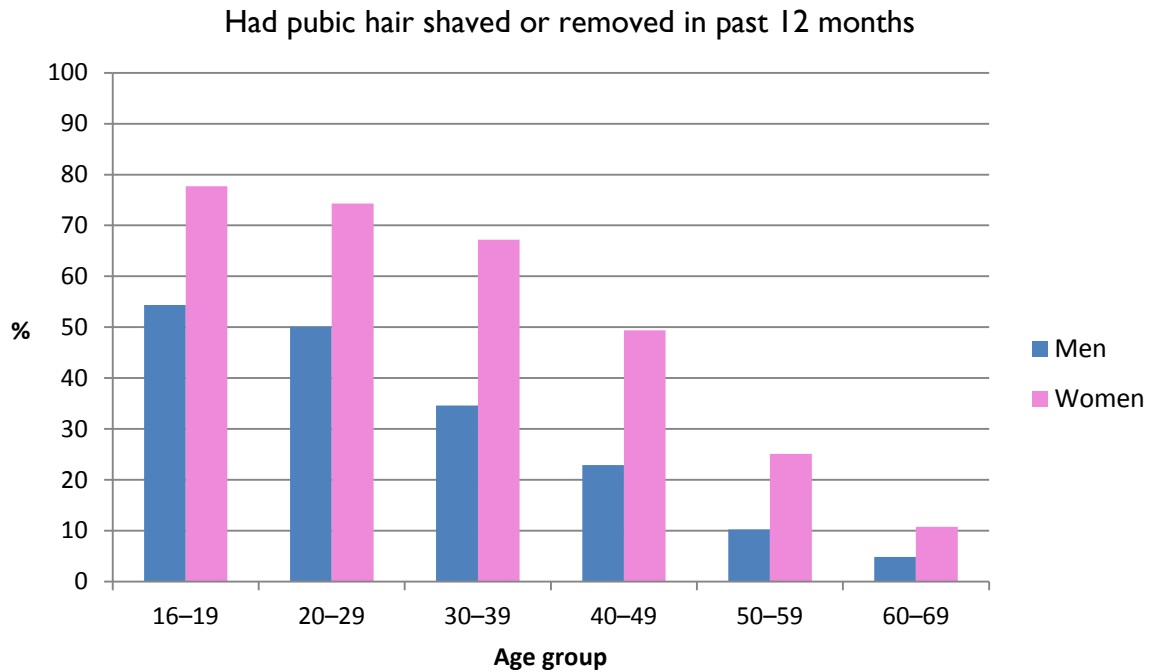


Most people who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual (about 90%) had felt sexually attracted to people of the same sex and had also had sexual experience with a same-sex partner.

Men were more likely than women to be exclusively attracted to (and have sex with) only men or women, and to identify as gay rather than bisexual. Younger people were more likely than people over 40 to identify as bisexual. This may be because people tend to settle down with a single partner as they get older.

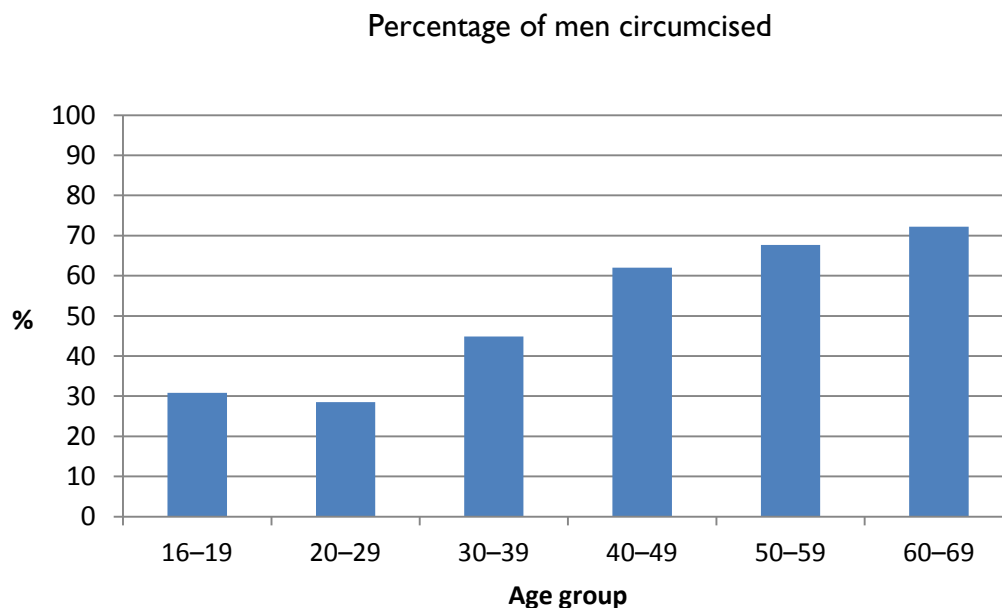
Pubic hair

Shaving, waxing or lasering the pubic hair has become common in recent years. (Note that some people just tidy up the pubic hair so that it does not show outside a swimming costume. However, complete shaving, waxing or laser removal is also common, especially among younger people. Our question did not distinguish between the two.)



Circumcision

Circumcision of newborn boys has become less common since the 1970s, and it is no longer routine in Australian hospitals. A minority of men under age 40 reported having been circumcised.



Sexual infections

Knowledge

- For each knowledge question, more than half of the respondents answered correctly
- 90% of people knew that people who have injected drugs are at risk for hepatitis C
- Most people (57%–77%) knew that cold sores and genital herpes are caused by the same virus, that herpes is incurable, that gonorrhoea can be transmitted through oral sex, and that chlamydia does not only affect women. Women (77%) were more likely than men (62%) to know that chlamydia can make women infertile
- Knowledge had improved since the last survey in 2002

Experience of infections

- Asked about a list of infections, 16% of people said they had ever had a sexually transmissible infection (STI) in their lifetime
- The most common was pubic lice or crabs: 7% men and 3% women
- 7% of women had had wart virus reported on a Pap smear
- 6% of men had had anal warts
- 3% of men and 5% of women had had chlamydia
- 2% of men and 3% of women had genital herpes
- In the last 12 months, 1.1% of men and 2.7% of women had had an STI

Most people were treated for their STIs by their GPs (family doctors); people with pubic lice also just went to the pharmacy for treatment.

37% of people had ever been tested for HIV. Of these, 0.6% of men and 0.3% of women were HIV-positive. Results suggest that about 1 per thousand heterosexual men, 1 in 20 gay men and 1 per thousand women in the sample were known to have HIV.

Attitudes

- Most Australians have positive attitudes toward premarital sex, abortion and homosexual behaviour
- Over the last decade there has been a shift toward less tolerance of sex outside a committed relationship
- Over the last decade there has been greater acceptance of homosexual behaviour

Sexual coercion

- Overall, 4% of men and 22% of women had ever been forced or frightened into doing something sexual that they did not want: 2% of men and 12% of women reported that this happened before they turned 17
- Men and women who had been coerced had poorer physical, psychological, and sexual well-being
- Few people who had been coerced talked to others about their experiences of sexual coercion, and very few had talked to a professional

Condom use

- Condom use has become more common in the last decade
- Although most people in regular relationships do not regularly use condoms, 90% of people have used a condom at some time in their lives
- Condom use during the most recent sexual encounter was more likely among people who were younger, who were having sex with a casual partner, and were not using another form of contraception
- Of people who had had casual sex in the past 6 months, 49% of people who had vaginal intercourse always used a condom, and 58% of men who had anal intercourse with a male partner always did so
- More consistent condom use would reduce the incidence of sexually transmissible infections, especially among young people, those who have casual sex, and those who have short relationships one after another ('serial monogamy') without getting tested for sexual infections

Changes in sexual behaviour and attitudes

Comparisons of data from the first ASHR survey in 2001–2002 and the second survey in 2012–2013 reveal a mixture of encouraging changes in some areas and a disappointing lack of change in other areas:

- Australians appear to have more permissive attitudes towards homosexuality, but have even stronger expectations of sexual exclusivity in relationships
- Australians appear to be having sex less frequently, but they have broader repertoires of sexual practice
- People are having sex in ways that may provide better protection against STIs and unintended pregnancy
- Women's reports of numbers of partners and range of sexual practices are becoming more similar to men's, suggesting a reduction in the double standard
- Despite these promising changes, there is room for improvement in several domains, including reducing rates of sexual coercion, which remain steady.

Please address inquiries to the investigators:

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The Second Australian Study of Health and Relationships was funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.