

# One in ten women in Britain report having experienced non-consensual sex

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One in ten women (9.8%) and roughly one in seventy men (1.4%), when asked "Has anyone actually made you have sex with them, against your will?" said yes, according to new results published as part of the third Natsal survey, published in *The Lancet*.

Of those who reported having had sex against their will (non-volitional sex), fewer than half (42.2% of women and 32.6% of men) had told anyone about it, and fewer still had reported it to the police (12.9 % of women and 8% of men).

According to the study's lead author, Wendy Macdowall, of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine: "These results shed light on an area that has historically been hidden, and that is rife with myths and misconceptions."

The researchers also found that while non-volitional sex can occur at any age, it was predominately an experience of younger age; the average age at the most recent occurrence was 18 years for women and 16 years for men. The study also confirmed that having experienced non-volitional sex is associated with a range of poor physical, mental and sexual health factors, including being treated for depression in the past year.

The person responsible was a stranger in only 15% of cases among women and men. In the majority of instances, that person was known to the individual, although the nature of the relationship varied with age. Among young women who were aged 13-15 years when the event

occurred, a family member or friend was responsible in nearly half of cases (45.2%), while for [women](#) aged 25 and over, a former or current partner was responsible in seven out of every ten instances (70.3%).

The prevalence estimates of non-volitional sex are higher than for the more narrowly defined rape statistics from the 2011/2012 Crime Survey for England and Wales, but are similar to estimates from non-crime population surveys in other high-income countries such as the USA and France.

Participants for the Natsal-3 survey were interviewed using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and computer-assisted self-interview (CASI) away from interviewers for sensitive questions, including those on non-volitional sex. Once the CASI section was complete, responses were 'locked' into the computer and could not be accessed by the interviewer. At the end of the interview, all participants were given a leaflet detailing organisations who could provide relevant help and advice.

Lead author Wendy Macdowall adds: "It is telling that the majority of the participants in our survey who had experienced sex against their will had not told anybody about it. Our findings point to the necessity for intervention at an early age to prevent [sex](#) that is non-consensual, and for greater efforts to be made to remove the barriers that prevent people from talking about their experience and seeking help.

"The findings support the need for training of health and other professionals to enable them to better provide appropriate services and guidance for people, and to work together across different sectors to help mitigate the harm caused by these experiences."

The results are part of the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal) survey, led by Professor Dame Anne Johnson of UCL

(which provided institutional leadership on the study's management and statistical analysis), and Professor Kaye Wellings, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Over 15,000 adults aged 16-74 years participated in interviews between September 2010 and August 2012, producing data on sexual behaviour, attitudes, health, and wellbeing.

Two previous Natsal surveys have taken place, in 1990 and 2000, making it one of the largest ever studies of sexual behaviour undertaken in a single country. The study was funded by the Medical Research Council and The Wellcome Trust, with additional funding from the Economic & Social Research Council and the Department of Health, and is published in a special issue of *The Lancet*.

Provided by University College London

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