

Chapter 3

Research Findings: Young People’s Experiences, Issues and Needs

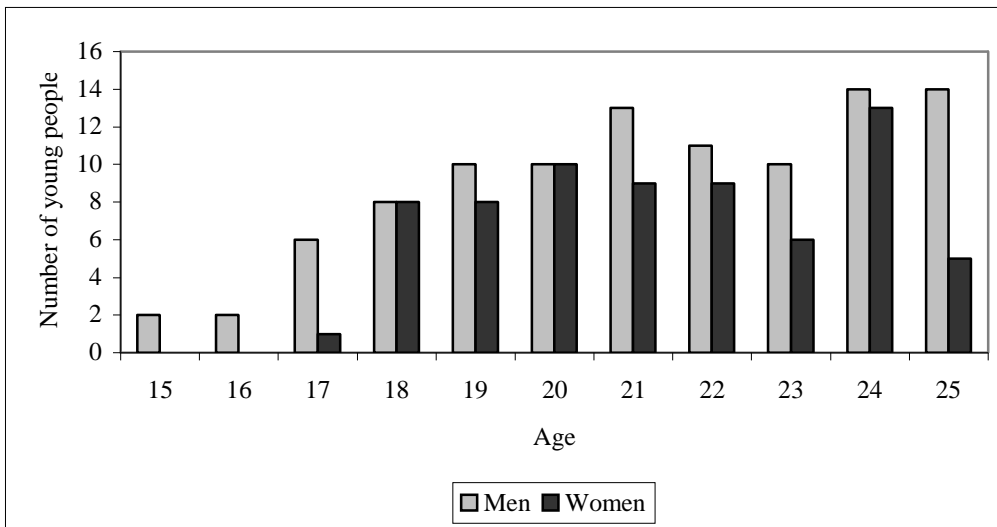
3.1 Health Experiences and Issues

3.1.1 Survey Respondents’ Characteristics

The Young People’s Health and Housing Survey was completed by 169 people.

The age and gender of respondents are shown in Chart 1 and Table 5.

Chart 1: Age and Gender of Survey Respondents



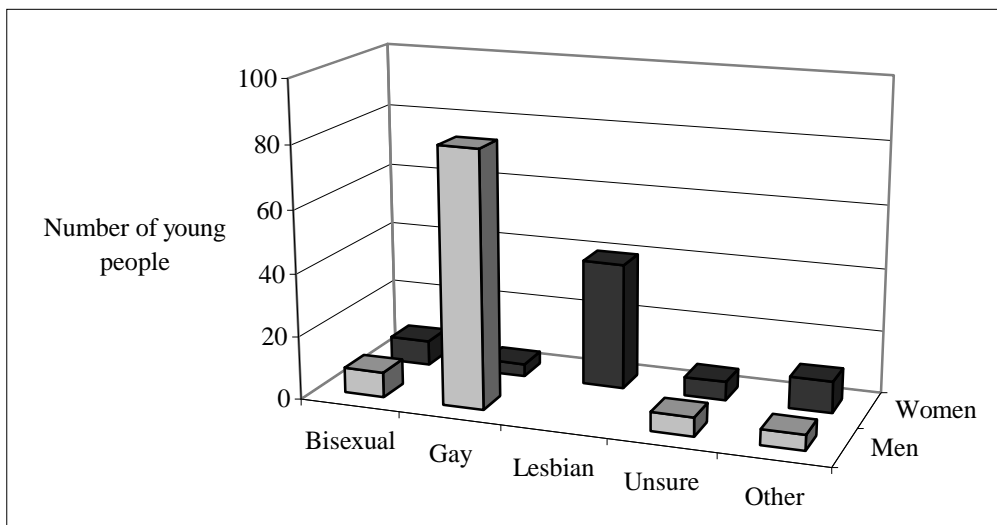
Note: $n = 169$

Table 5: Age of Survey Respondents

Age	Men	Women
16 and Under	4	0
17-18	12	9 (13%)
19-21	33	27 (39%)
22-25	51	33 (48%)
Total	100	69

The sexual identity of respondents is shown in Chart 2.

Chart 2: Sexual Identity of Survey Respondents



Note: $n = 169$

- Nine per cent of respondents identified as bisexual: eight per cent of men and 12 per cent of women.
- Fifty per cent of respondents identified as gay: 81 per cent of men and six per cent of women.
- Fifty-nine per cent of women identified as lesbian.

- Seven per cent of respondents were unsure of their sexual identity: six per cent of men and nine per cent of women. Seventy-five per cent of those who were unsure were aged 18 or less.
- Nine per cent of respondents identified their sexual identity as ‘other’: five per cent of men and 15 per cent of women. Most of those identifying as ‘other’ stated that they were heterosexual although one was a male-to-female transsexual.

Tables 6 and 7 show the ethnic identity of respondents.

Table 6: Ethnic Identity of Survey Respondents

Ethnicity	Men	Women
Black African		1
Black Caribbean	1	1
Indian		1
Irish	3	4
Mixed race	2	
Pakistani	3	
White British	84	52

Note: $n = 152$

Table 7: Respondents identifying their Ethnic Identity as ‘Other’

Ethnicity	Number
Asian	1
British	2
British Indian	1
European	1
German	1
Italian	1
Scottish	1
Welsh	1
White American	2
White Italian	1
White Slavic	1

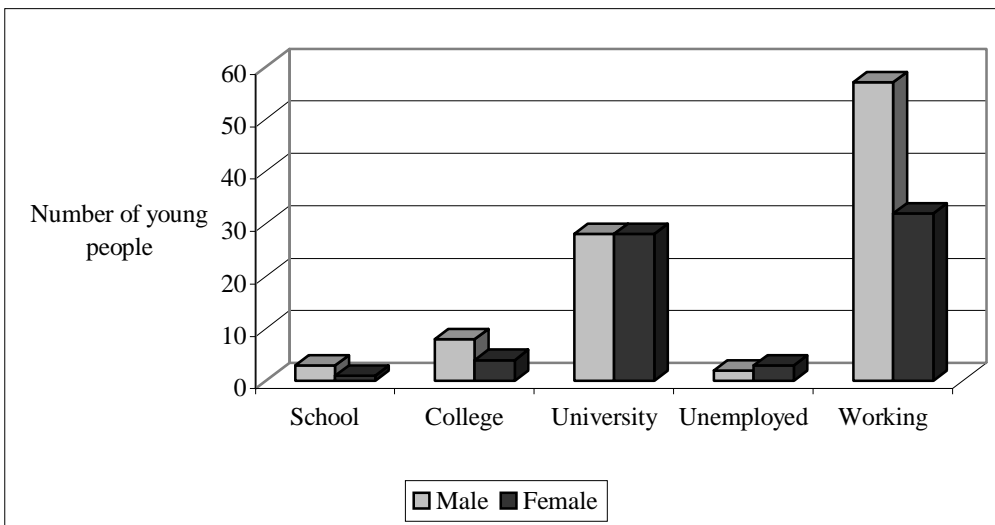
Note: $n = 13$

- Four per cent of respondents identified as Asian.

- Three per cent of respondents identified as Black.
- Four per cent of respondents identified as Irish.
- Eighty per cent of respondents identified as white British.
- Nine per cent of respondents identified as 'other' (see Table 7).

Chart 3 and Tables 8 and 9 show the occupational status of respondents.

Chart 3: Occupation of Respondents



Note: $n = 167$

- Two per cent of respondents were at school: three per cent of men and two per cent of women.
- Seven per cent of respondents were at college: eight per cent of men and six per cent of women.

- Twenty-eight per cent of men and 40 per cent of women were at university.
- Three per cent of respondents were unemployed: two per cent of men and four per cent of women.
- Fifty-three per cent of respondents were in work: 58 per cent of men and 47 per cent of women.

Table 8: Respondents' Employment Status by Sector

Sector	Men (1)	Women (2)
Public Sector	8	6
Private Sector	39	23
Private Sector – Management	8	1
Commercial Sex Work (3)	1	

Notes: (1) $n = 56$; (2) $n = 30$;

(3) Commercial sex work refers to the selling of sex, i.e. prostitution.

- Sixteen per cent of respondents worked in the public sector: 14 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women.
- Seventy-two per cent of respondents worked in the private sector: 70 per cent of men and 77 per cent of women.
- Ten per cent of respondents held managerial positions in the private sector: 14 per cent of men and three per cent of women.
- One young man was a commercial sex worker.

Table 9: Respondents Claiming Welfare Benefits

Welfare benefit	Men	Women
Housing Benefit	3	4
Income Support		3
Job Seekers Allowance	1	1

Note: $n = 12$

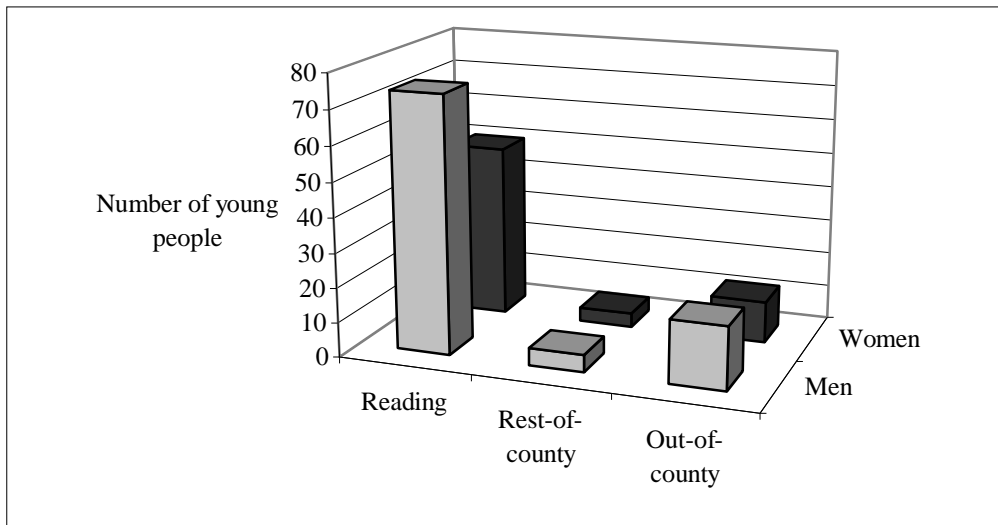
- Twelve young people (seven per cent) were claiming some form of welfare benefit.

Table 10 and Chart 4 show respondents' area of residence.

Table 10: Respondents' Residence by Area

Area	Men	Women
Aylesbury	1	
Basingstoke	3	3
Birmingham	1	1
Buckinghamshire		4
Camberley	2	
Farnborough	5	
High Wycombe		1
Hook	1	
Hungerford	1	
London	2	2
Maidenhead	1	1
Newbury	2	1
Oxford	1	1
Reading	74	50
Winchester	2	
Wokingham	1	2
Total	97	66

Chart 4: Summary of Respondents' Residence by Area



Note: $n = 163$

- Seventy-three per cent of respondents lived in Reading.

- Five per cent of respondents lived in other parts of Berkshire.
- Eighteen per cent of respondents lived in other counties, mostly neighbouring or counties in the Southeast region.

- Eight respondents were registered disabled: two men and six women.

This was a substantial sample for a medium-sized town and it compares with similar studies in other areas of Britain. In terms of age, the sample was a youthful one: all 169 respondents were aged 25 and under and 29 per cent of respondents were aged 18 and under. There were no significant differences in age composition in terms of gender, however, a greater number of respondents were male than female. This in part reflects the fact that bisexual, gay and lesbian community organisations and scene venues are male-oriented and male-dominated. In terms of sexual identity, the overwhelming majority (83 per cent) of respondents identified as bisexual, gay or lesbian. Those who were unsure tended to be younger. In terms of ethnic identity, seven per cent identified as Asian and Black. According to the 1991 Census, the Asian and Black population of Reading was 8.4 per cent of the total (see Figure 7). The slightly lower figure in the sample reflects the invisibility of Asian and Black bisexual, gay and lesbian people in both community organisations and scene venues. In terms of residence, the overwhelming majority of respondents (73 per cent) lived in Reading.

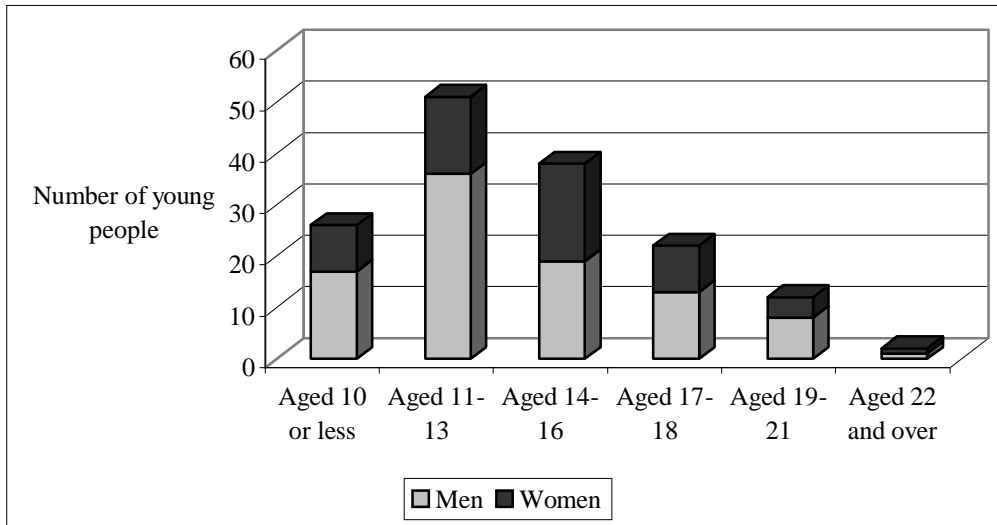
This sample therefore is of relevance and significance. It is a *local* study of *young, bisexuals, gays and lesbians*.

3.1.2 Age of Consent for Gays and Lesbians

Survey Data

Chart 5 shows the age at which respondents were aware of their sexual identity/sexual ‘difference’.

Chart 5: Age when Respondents were First Aware of their Sexual Identity/Sexual ‘Difference’

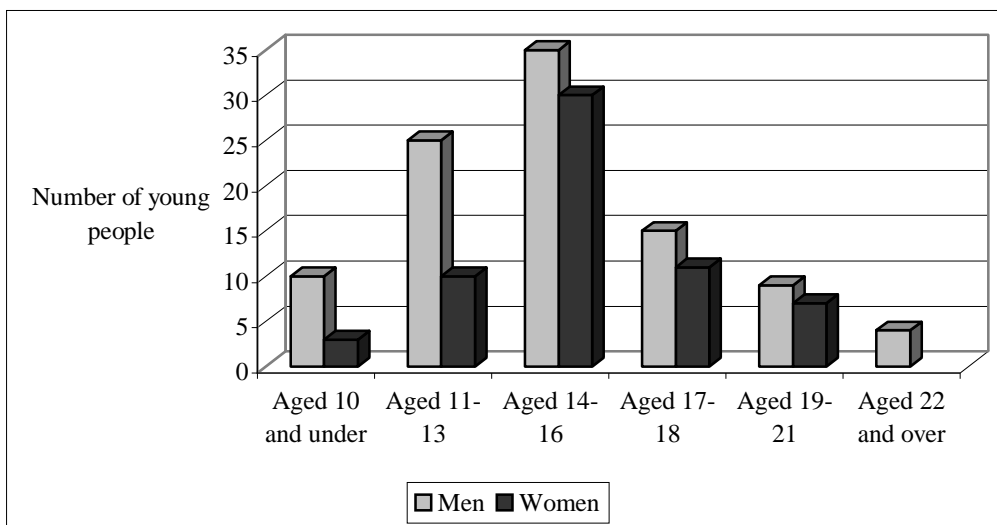


Note: $n = 151$

- Forty-five per cent of respondents were aware of their sexual identity/sexual 'difference' by the age of 13: 56 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women.
- Sixty-eight per cent of respondents were aware by the age of 16: 77 per cent of men and 75 per cent of women.
- Eighty-one per cent of respondents were aware by the age of 18: 90 per cent of men and 91 per cent of women.

Chart 6 shows the age of respondents' first sexual experience.

Chart 6: Age of Respondents' First Sexual Experience



Note: $n = 158$

- Twenty-eight per cent of respondents had had their first sexual experience by the age of 13: 36 per cent of men and 21 per cent of women.
- Sixty-seven per cent of respondents had had their first sexual experience by the age of 16: 71 per cent of men and 70 per cent of women.
- Eighty-two per cent of respondents had had their first sexual experience by the age of 18: 87 per cent of men and 89 per cent of women.

Table 11 shows the gender of respondents' first sexual experience.

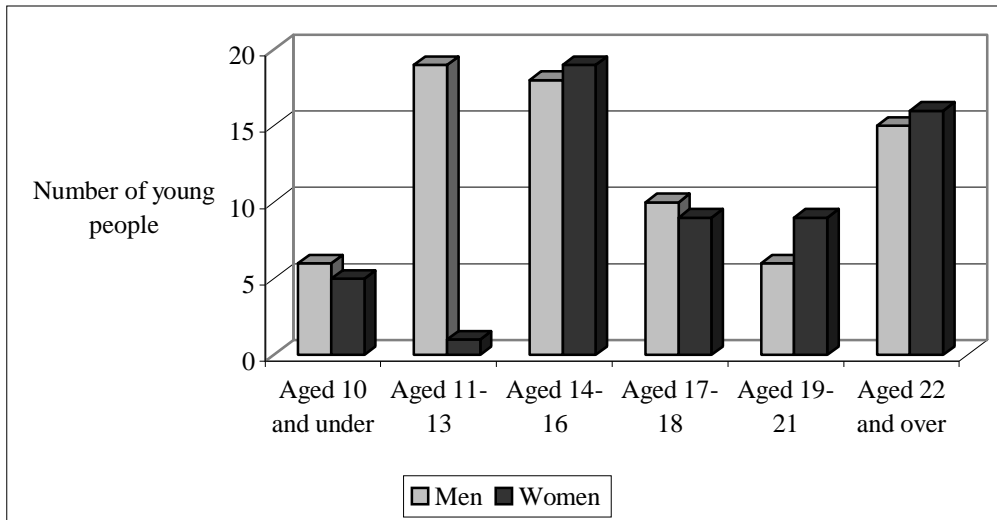
Table 11: Gender of Respondents' First Sexual Experience

	Men	Women
Female First Sexual Partner	44	20
Male First Sexual Partner	66	30

- Sixty-nine per cent of male respondents' first sexual experiences were with other men; 31 per cent were with women.
- Sixty-nine per cent of female respondents' first sexual experiences were with men; 31 per cent were with other women.

Chart 7 shows the age of respondents' first gay or lesbian sexual experience.

Chart 7: Age of Respondents' First Gay or Lesbian Sexual Experience

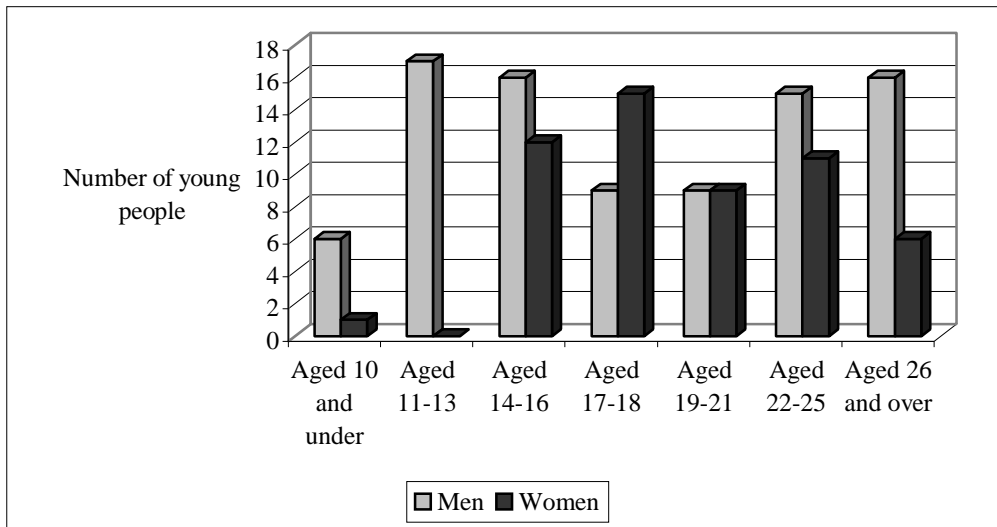


Note: $n = 133$

- Eighteen per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience by the age of 13: 34 per cent of men and ten per cent of women.
- Forty per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience by the age of 16: 58 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women.
- Fifty-one per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience by the age of 18: 72 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women.

Chart 8 shows the age of the partner of respondents' first gay or lesbian sexual experience.

Chart 8: Age of Partner for First Gay or Lesbian Sexual Experience



Note: $n = 142$

- Fourteen per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience with someone who was aged 13 or less: 26 per cent of men and two per cent of women.
- Thirty-one per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience with someone who was aged 16 or less: 44 per cent of men and 24 per cent of women.
- Forty-five per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience with someone who was aged 18 or less: 55 per cent of men and 52 per cent of women.
- Seventy-one per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience with someone under the age of 25: 82 per cent of men and 89 per cent of women.

- Only 13 per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience with someone over the age of 25: 18 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women.

Table 12 shows the place where respondents met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner.

Table 12: Place where Respondents met their First Gay or Lesbian Sexual Partner

Location	Men	Women
Chat-line/Personal Advert	4	1
College/University	3	10
Friend/Through friends	18	10
Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Scene	22	15
Public Sex Environment (1)	8	
School	18	12
Work	6	2
Elsewhere	11	4
Total	90	54

Note: (1) 'Public sex environment' refers to public toilets, parks and other public places through which men meet for sex. Sex between men in public toilets is known as 'cottaging'; sex between men in open public spaces or parks is known as 'cruising'.

- Three per cent of respondents met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner through chat-lines/ personal adverts: four per cent of men and two per cent of women.
- Eight per cent met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner at college or university: three per cent of men and 19 per cent of women.
- Seventeen per cent of respondents' first gay or lesbian sexual partners were friends, or were met through friends: 20 per cent of men and 19 per cent of women.
- Twenty-two per cent of respondents met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner on the gay scene: 24 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women.

- Nine per cent of men met their first gay sexual partner through a public sex environment.
- Eighteen per cent of respondents met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner at school: 20 per cent of men and 22 per cent of women.
- Six per cent of respondents met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner at work: seven per cent of men and four per cent of women.

Data from Interviews

Several young people raised the issue of the age of consent during interviews:

“I think the age of consent for gays should be lower [than 18]. The risks from heterosexual sex are the same. Under-age sex does happen and sex is important in a relationship.” (Young man.)

“I think the age of consent should be lowered and equal for both heterosexual and gay people.” (Young woman.)

“I think they should raise it to 18 because you’re not mature enough to make decisions and 18 is the legal age for everything else.” (Young man.)

“ReachOUT has an age limit lower than the age of consent. When you start secondary school at the age of 12 most people don’t know what they are. But I knew at an early age, so what happens for people between 12 and 16?” (Young man.)

“The younger ones need someone to talk to because you’re not always sure. You can be confused.” (Young man.)

“They don’t give us the option to be gay.” (Young man.)

“I was 15 when I came to ReachOUT, but it didn’t frighten me into not coming.” (Young man.)

Discussion

Trenchard and Warren (1984) in their survey of 416 young gay and lesbian people found that 68 per cent had had homosexual sex before the age of 18. Sixty-two per cent of men and 32 per cent of women had had homosexual sex before the age of 15. Fifty-eight per cent of men and 75 per cent of women under the age of 21 had had homosexual sex with someone of their own age.

Project Sigma's survey of 1,633 men at the 1993 Pride Festival found that 78 per cent had had homosexual sex before it was legal; the mean age of men's first gay sexual experience was 16.75 years (Hickson *et al*, 1994).

Project Sigma (1994) argued that a higher age of consent did not prevent homosexuality. Among their sample of 1,100 bisexual and gay men, 61 per cent had had homosexual sex by the age of 16 and 88 per cent by the age of 21 (the average age was 15.7 years old). Of the men who had experienced their first homosexual sex before the age of 16, 90 per cent had already recognised their sexual 'difference'. Furthermore, 40 per cent of these sexual encounters were with young men of their own age and 60 per cent were with young men within two years of their age. The vast majority of these men had hoped for their first sexual encounter and many actively sought it.

Stonewall's (1994) survey of 2,408 bisexual, gay and lesbian people about their sex education and the age of consent found that 57 per cent of men had had their first gay sexual experience before the age of 18 and 21 per cent between the ages of 18-20. Thirty-four per cent of women had had their first lesbian sexual experience before they were 18 and 31 per cent between 18-20. Only 22 per cent of men and 35 per cent of women had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience when legal (the age of consent for gay men was 21 at the time).

ReachOUT's research project found that 81 per cent of respondents were aware of their sexual identity/'difference' before the age of 18 (the age of consent at the time of writing) and 68 per cent by the age of 16. Furthermore, 45 per cent of respondents were aware by the age of 13 although men seemed to be aware of their sexual identity/sexual 'difference' at an earlier age than women.

Eighty-two per cent of respondents had been sexually active by the age of 18 and 67 per cent by the age of 16. Thirty-six per cent of men and 21 per cent of women had been sexually active by the age of 13.

Sixty-nine per cent of men's first sexual experiences were with other men. However, 69 per cent of women's first sexual experience were with men and only 31 per cent were with other women.

Fifty-one per cent of respondents had already had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience by the age of 18 and 40 per cent by the age of 16. Thirty-four per cent of men and ten per cent of women had already had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience by the age of 13. Seventy-one per cent of respondents had had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience with someone aged 25 or under.

Thirty-five per cent of respondents met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner at school, or it was a friend or through friends. Sixty-five per cent of respondents met their first gay or lesbian sexual partner at school, college, university, on the scene, or it was a friend or through friends. Only nine per cent men met their partner through a public sex environment.

In terms of men having had their first gay sexual experience before the legal age, ReachOUT’s findings broadly mirror the findings of studies by Trenchard and Warren (1984), Project Sigma (1994) and Stonewall (1994) as shown in Figure 9. These studies found that over 60 per cent of men had experienced gay sex before the legal age of consent. The findings of the aforementioned studies also suggest that gay and bisexual men are sexually active at an earlier age than their heterosexual counterparts.

Figure 9: Age of Young Men’s First Sexual Experience

Age	Young Bisexual and Gay Men: ReachOUT’s Findings	Young Bisexual and Gay Men: Other Studies	Young Men: General Studies
Before 16	58% (1)	62% (2)	33% (4)
Before 18	72% (1)	63% (3)	60% (5)

Notes: (1) $n = 74$; (2) Trenchard & Warren (1984) and Project Sigma (1994); (3) Trenchard & Warren (1984) and Stonewall (1994); (4) Ford (1991), Health Education Authority (1992) and Johnson *et al* (1994); (5) Health Education Authority (1992).

Although there is no legally prescribed age of consent for lesbians, due to the ‘Queen Victoria Syndrome’ – that women ‘didn’t do that sort of thing’ and that “[a legal age of consent] would bring it to the notice of women who have never heard of it” (House of Lords, 1921) – the practical legal age is 16. In terms of women having had their first lesbian sexual experience before the legal age, ReachOUT’s survey found that 42 per cent had, compared to over 30 per cent in Trenchard and Warren’s (1984) and Stonewall’s (1994) studies as shown in Figure 10. Furthermore, according to these studies, heterosexual women are more likely to be sexually active by the age of 18 than their bisexual and lesbian counterparts.

Figure 10: Age of Young Women’s Sexual Experience

Age	Young Bisexual and Lesbian Women: ReachOUT’s Findings	Young Bisexual and Lesbian Women: Other Studies	Young Women: General Studies
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Before 16	42% (1)	32% (2)	30% (4)
Before 18	58% (1)	34% (3)	61% (5)

Notes: (1) $n = 59$; (2) Trenchard & Warren (1984); (3) Stonewall (1994); (4) Ford (1991), Health Education Authority (1992) and Johnson *et al* (1994); (5) Health Education Authority (1992).

In 1967 the Sexual Offences Act decriminalised gay sex between consenting adults aged 21 and over in private, in England and Wales, following the recommendation of the Wolfenden Report (1957). The age of consent was reduced from 21 to 18 in 1994 (Stonewall, 1998).

Following a sustained campaign to reduce the age of consent – supported by Barnardos, British Medical Association, National Union of Teachers, NSPCC, Royal College of Nursing, Save the Children, etc. – there followed three important debates and votes in the House of Commons and House of Lords. In June 1998, the Commons voted by a majority of 207 votes to reduce the age of consent from 18 to 16 (Ward, 1999). In July 1998, the Lords voted by a majority of 168 to keep the age at 18 (Jones, 1998). In January 1999, the Commons voted by 313 votes to 130 to reduce the age to 16 (a majority of 183) (Ward, 1999) and invoked the Parliament Act. Following a grace period of one year, the age of consent for gay men will be equalised in the spring of 2000.

During these debates in the Commons and Lords, a number of powerful fears and myths were expressed, for example:

Baroness Young (leading the revolt in the Lords) said that homosexual practices “carry very great health risks to young people.” She also stated that “I don’t think there is a moral equivalent between homosexual and heterosexual relationships.”

The Archbishop of Canterbury felt that lowering the age of consent for gay men “would send the wrong messages to teenagers.”

The Bishop of Winchester said, “I am not convinced that even today all young people are so clear by 16 about their orientation that there is no risk of them being prematurely encouraged by the sexual supermarket into practices and cultures from which they later find it hard to emerge.”

Lord Jakobovits asked, “if it is argued that nothing between consenting adults ought to be branded wrong or criminal then why retain bigamy or incest as actionable offences?”

Lord Habgood stated that “homosexuals and heterosexuals are not equal. They are different. To treat them as if they weren’t is to open the door to changes further down the line which would be highly undesirable.”

(Cited in Shrimley, 1998).

Those who argued against change focused on two main issues: the need to protect ('vulnerable') young men from ('predatory') older men and the age at which young men become aware of their sexual identity (and their need for 'time to be sure'). ReachOUT's research project and the findings of other studies help to dispel these fears and myths and throw some light onto these arguments:

- Most young men and women were aware of their sexual identity at an early age; they don't need 'time to be sure'.
- Many young men and women were sexually active before the legal age of consent. A higher legal age only serves to criminalise them and discourages them from seeking peers and support.
- Most young men and women had their first gay or lesbian sexual experience with someone of a similar age, who they met through school, college, university, on the scene, or it was a friend or through friends. They were not 'preyed' on and seduced by older people.

There was a consensus among the young people that discussed the issue during interviews that the age of consent for gay men should be reduced to 16 and/or should be equal to that of heterosexuals. These young people also highlighted two other important issues: the need for support and someone to talk to if unsure about your sexual identity and the implications of the age of consent for service provision for those under the legal age.

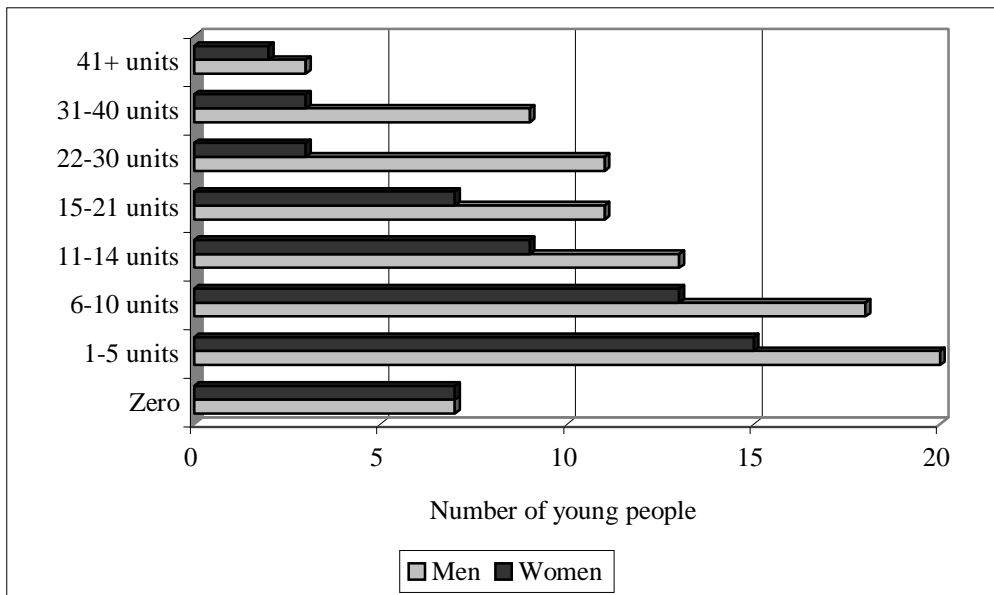
For workers' perspectives on the age of consent see Section 4.3.

3.1.3 Alcohol Use and Abuse

Survey Data

Chart 9 shows respondents' average weekly consumption of alcohol.

Chart 9: Respondents' Weekly Alcohol Consumption

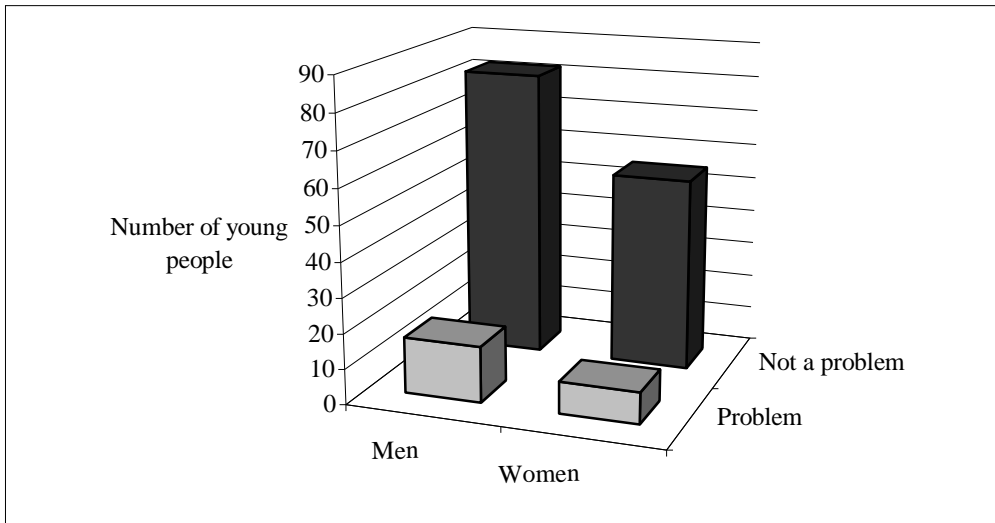


Note: $n = 151$

- Eight per cent of respondents did not consume alcohol: eight per cent of men and 12 per cent of women.
- Fifty-nine per cent of respondents consumed *less* than the recommended safe level of alcohol: 67 per cent of men and 63 per cent of women.
- Twenty-two per cent of respondents consumed *more* than the recommended safe level: 25 per cent of men and 26 per cent of women.

Chart 10 shows the number of respondents who considered their alcohol consumption to be a problem. Table 13 shows why.

Chart 10: Respondents who considered their Alcohol Consumption a Problem



Note: $n = 162$

- Fifteen per cent of respondents considered their alcohol consumption a problem: 16 per cent of men and 14 per cent of women.

Table 13: Reasons why Respondents' Alcohol Consumption was considered a Problem

Reason	Men	Women
"Ashamed of sexual identity"	1	
"Lack of confidence"	1	1
"I drink to forget"		1
"Health and weight worries"	2	1
"I drink at home alone"		1
"Memory loss"	2	
"Too much partying"	2	1
"Relationship problems"	1	
"Stress"	1	
"Drink too much"	6	4

Note: $n = 25$

Data from Interviews

Several young people raised the issue of alcohol use and abuse during interviews:

“One of my friends, well I wouldn’t say she has a serious alcohol abuse problem, but she does get drunk on a regular basis.” (Young woman.)

“I think lesbians do drink a lot. It’s the scene. If you are on the scene every day and drinking, then you think that you are drinking a lot.” (Young woman.)

“When I meet up with my friends we always meet in a pub. I go out three or four nights a week and spend ridiculous amounts of money.” (Young woman.)

“I do think some people drink too much. If something has happened during the week, they just let it all out of their system.” (Young man.)

“I think drinking is just a youth thing, although perhaps gay people do it to take away the pressures of coming to terms with being gay.” (Young man.)

“I drink so that I can dance, it’s ‘Dutch courage.’” (Young man.)

“I think the reasons why we drink are the same as for heterosexuals. If gay people have a problem it may be to do with other things, not just because they’re gay.” (Young man.)

“It may be to do with us meeting just in pubs and clubs. The time we spend together is concentrated, unlike heterosexuals who mix 24 hours a day. So obviously gays have to cram a lot more enjoyment into the time they do spend together.” (Young man.)

“Loads of people at work aren’t out so when they come back they just want to relax and be themselves. They go clubbing and drinking.” (Young man.)

“Some gay people have problems at home, and there is peer pressure to drink.” (Young man.)

“As an Asian Muslim, I sometimes feel pressured into drinking when I’m out on the scene. People pressure you if they know you don’t drink.” (Young man.)

“I think your defences are lower when you’re drunk.” (Young man.)

“Your inhibitions go and you can go and talk to people more easily.” (Young man.)

“I think some of my friends drink because they are not happy.” (Young man.)

“I think many gay people drink to try and fit in, to make up for a gap in their lives. They try to live like ‘Absolutely Fabulous’ because it is seen as cool and trendy. It’s not just a lifestyle thing though, it’s also an escape for some: to hide from themselves and being gay. So it can also be destructive.” (Young man.)

“If you want to go out socially, the only places to go to are pubs. There isn’t anywhere else you can go if you want gay space. So you are pretty much forced into a situation where if you want to go out and socialise with gay people, you have to drink.” (Young woman.)

“There is also the self-esteem thing. I am sure that excessive drinking is related to self-image and stuff.” (Young woman.)

Discussion

Alcohol abuse by young people tends to be episodic, resulting in accidents and violence rather than cirrhosis or alcoholism (Shanks, 1990). However, there are an estimated 250,000 alcohol-related deaths every year in Britain, a figure that includes young people (Garcia, 1997).

Goddard’s (1996) study found that 26 per cent of male students and 22 per cent of female students aged 11–15 had consumed alcohol in England in 1994 (cited in Coleman, 1997).

The Schools Health Education Unit’s (1997) survey of alcohol use by 8,000 young people found that four out of five had consumed alcohol by the ages of 14 or 15 (cited in Carvel, 1997).

Saghir and Robins (1970) found high levels of alcohol consumption and alcoholism among lesbians in their study (35 per cent, compared to five per cent in their heterosexual sample). In their 1973 study, 30 per cent of gay men and 35 per cent of lesbians either consumed alcohol excessively or considered themselves dependent. Fifield (1975) estimated 31 per cent of the gay and lesbian population in Los Angeles exhibited signs of alcoholism or had alcohol problems. Lohrenz *et al* (1978) found that 29 per cent of their sample of gay men were alcoholics. All four studies were conducted in the United States (cited in Malley, 1992).

Diamond and Wilsnack (1978) in their study in the United States identified strong dependency needs, low self-esteem and a high incidence of depression among lesbian alcohol abusers (cited in Lesbian Information Service, 1995d).

A literature review by MacEwan (1982) surveyed fifteen published studies in the United States. It was estimated from these studies that an average of 30 per cent of gay men and lesbians were affected by alcohol misuse (cited in Brixton Alcohol Counselling Service, 1987).

Nardi's (1982) study in the United States concluded that although no causal relationship between homosexuality and alcoholism had been established the literature often emphasised latent homosexuality as a cause of alcoholism. Nardi also commented on the lack of research into the support networks of gay and lesbian alcohol abusers, and noted the invisibility of gay and lesbian alcohol abusers' issues and needs in prevention and treatment programmes and strategies. Nardi concluded there was a need to look at alcohol use and abuse from within the gay and lesbian sub-culture – i.e. to develop a gay and lesbian perspective – rather than allowing definitions and structures to be imposed (cited in Lesbian Information Service, 1995d).

Bittle's (1982) study in the United States estimated the number of gay and lesbian alcoholics to be three times greater than the number of alcoholics in the general population (cited in Lesbian Information Service, 1995d).

Lewis *et al* (1982) found that 33 per cent of the lesbians in their study in the United States had high alcohol consumption patterns (compared to only seven per cent of heterosexual women) and 28 per cent of the lesbians were classed as alcoholics (compared to five per cent of heterosexual women) (cited in Bridget, 1994).

McKenny *et al* (1983) found alcohol (and drug use) closely related to, and perhaps symptomatic of, suicidal behaviour. Zehner and Lewis (1984) estimated that 20-30 per cent of the gay and lesbian population was alcohol dependent, two to three times greater than in the general population. Covington and Kohen's (1984) study of women (including lesbians) found that sexual dysfunction and abuse preceded as well as accompanied alcoholism. Gillow and Davis' (1987) study found that 59 per cent of lesbian participants had used alcohol as a method of coping with stress and homophobia. All four studies were conducted in the United States (cited in Lesbian Information Service, 1995d).

In Stall and Wiley's (1988) sample of gay men, 19 per cent reported frequent and high alcohol consumption levels. McKirnan and Peterson (1988) found 23 per cent of gay men and lesbians in their sample had alcohol problems. McKirnan and Peterson (1989), looking at the reporting of alcohol problems in terms of age, found that gay men and lesbians exhibited lower decreasing rates of problem-reporting with age compared to the general population. All three studies were conducted in the United States (cited in Malley, 1992).

Neisen and Sandall (1990) reported a significant prevalence of sexual abuse among recovering chemically dependent gay men and lesbians (nearly half of their sample). Schilit *et al* (1990), in their study of lesbian relationships, found a high level of reporting of alcohol (and drug) use prior to, or during, violence towards their partner(s). Creith's (1993) survey of 326 lesbians found 37 per cent consumed alcohol over the recommended levels. All three studies were conducted in the United States (cited in Lesbian Information Service, 1995d).

In the Brixton Alcohol Counselling Service's (1987) sample of 100 gay and lesbian service users, 36 were under 30 years of age and 14 were African-Caribbean or Asian.

The Lesbian Information Service conducted a survey of twenty young lesbians in Northwest England between 1990-93. Seventeen of these young women were under 25. The survey found that 17 had used alcohol, ten had experienced serious alcohol problems (hospitalisation, etc.), 15 lived in rural areas with little or no access to support, 13 identified as working class, three identified as Black, four were disabled, ten had been sexually abused or sexually assaulted, 14 had attempted suicide, all had experienced depression, ten had been homeless, ten had been unemployed and four were mothers. This survey revealed several inter-related issues and problems experienced by a group of isolated and multi-oppressed young lesbians (cited in Bridget, 1994).

Project Sigma undertook a study of 461 bisexual and gay men to investigate the link between alcohol use and unsafe sex. Alcohol was involved in 30 per cent of unsafe sexual encounters. The study concluded that sex between men under the influence of alcohol was no more likely to be unsafe than sex where alcohol had not been consumed. Alcohol use did not significantly effect the rate of condom use, nor did the quantity of alcohol consumed have any significant effect on behaviour (Weatherburn *et al*, 1993).

Bridget's (1994) survey of 121 workers in several alcohol services in Northwest England reported that only four per cent had received excellent training around lesbian issues, 20 per cent had received poor training and 53 per cent had received no training. Eight per cent did not believe any of their clients were lesbian, 44 per cent did not know and only four per cent always asked about their clients' sexual identity compared to 36 per cent who did not. Five per cent felt uncomfortable working with lesbians who hid their sexual identity. Twenty-two per cent agreed that lesbians with alcohol problems had unique needs while 34 per cent disagreed. Sixty-nine per cent believed the best treatment approach was the same as for other clients. Twenty per cent felt that it was not helpful to employ openly lesbian staff and only 20 per cent were in favour of specialised treatment programmes for lesbians.

In a study of 120 lesbians' alcohol use by Bloor (1995), 49 per cent consumed over 14 units per week (compared to only 11 per cent of the general population). Furthermore, one third consumed 22 units or more (which carries much higher risks of damaging health given that women have a lower water-to-body-fat ratio). Half of the women in the

study experienced relationship problems, including violence, and two thirds experienced abuse, discrimination and harassment as a result of their sexual identity. Several women commented on the problematic nature of the lesbian scene (being predominantly based around clubs and pubs). The study also revealed use of alcohol at specific times (during relationship difficulties and sexual encounters) and the use of alcohol as a way of coping with homophobia.

Muir-Mackenzie’s (1996) survey of 55 people at the ‘Health of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Nation’ Conference found that 84 per cent consumed alcohol and 15 per cent consumed more than twenty units per week.

ReachOUT’s research project found that eight per cent of men and women did not consume alcohol, that the majority consumed at or below the recommended safe level, that 22 per cent consumed more than the recommended safe level and that 15 per cent considered their alcohol consumption to be a problem.

Figure 11 shows the levels of alcohol use by young people, comparing ReachOUT’s findings with those of other studies.

Figure 11: Alcohol Use among Young People

Alcohol Use	Young Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians: ReachOUT’s Findings	Gays and Lesbians: Other Studies (All Ages)	Young People: General Studies
Men over the Recommended Limit (21 units/week)	25% (1)	15% (3)	“The General Household Survey consistently found that 18- to 24-year olds have the highest consumption of any age group and the most drinking at unsafe levels.” (5)

Women, Over the Recommended Limit (14 units/week)	26% (2)	32% (4)	See above. However, “among all ages, men drink twice as much as women.” (6)
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Notes: (1) $n = 92$; (2) $n = 59$; (3) Muir-Mackenzie (1996); (4) Bloor (1995) and Muir-Mackenzie (1996); (5) Howarth *et al* (1998); (6) National Youth Agency (1999).

Differences between the data sets make comparisons difficult. However, it is legitimate to state that alcohol use and abuse is an issue for both young people *generally* and for bisexuals, gays and lesbians *specifically* for the reasons discussed below. It is also important to note that although ReachOUT’s research project found no significant differences in terms of gender, general studies found that, among all ages, men tend to consume twice as much alcohol as women.

Young people’s statements (from the survey) as to why they considered their alcohol consumption to be a problem, and the statements made during interviews, suggest there are three main reasons for alcohol use and abuse *specific* to bisexual, gay and lesbian youth: the fact that the gay and lesbian scene is based around bars, clubs and pubs, the ‘Ab Fab’ lifestyle factor and the coping factor.

An obvious factor specific to bisexuals, gays and lesbians is that the gay and lesbian scene is predominantly based around bars, clubs and pubs. It could be argued that this social reality encourages alcohol use and abuse; it certainly facilitates these.

Partying and socialising (in bars, clubs, pubs and elsewhere) are integral factors in most young people’s lifestyle and alcohol use and abuse can be linked to these activities. Furthermore, it can be argued that there is an element of hedonism within the bisexual, gay and lesbian sub-culture that is pronounced among young people. This encourages alcohol use and abuse, for example, the desire/peer pressure to emulate the hedonistic lifestyle of the Edina and Patsy characters in ‘Absolutely Fabulous’.

There is also evidence that young people use and abuse alcohol as a coping mechanism for issues and problems in their lives: for example, to overcome inhibitions when socialising, to compensate for their lack of confidence and/or low self-esteem, to ‘numb’ their realities, to cope with loneliness, relationship problems, stress, etc. Evidence was found linking some of these issues and problems – sometimes related to sexual identity, sometimes not – with the use and abuse of alcohol.

The data from ReachOUT’s research project and other studies suggests there are several factors associated with alcohol use and abuse among bisexual, gay and lesbian youth: the setting many young people socialise in (i.e. bars, clubs and pubs), lifestyle factors (partying and hedonism), peer pressure to consume alcohol and consuming

alcohol as a coping mechanism (including but not exclusive to, issues and problems linked to sexual identity).

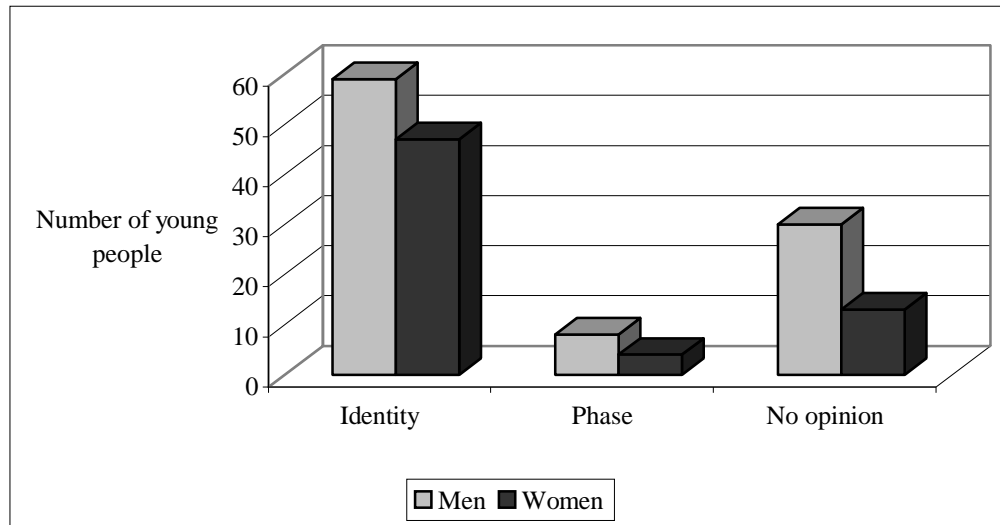
3.1.4 Bisexuality

Survey Data

Nine per cent of respondents identified as bisexual: eight per cent of men and 12 per cent of women.

Chart 11 shows respondents' views on bisexuality.

Chart 11: Respondents' Views on Bisexuality



Note: $n = 161$

- Sixty-three per cent of respondents considered bisexuality to be a sexual identity in its own right: 61 per cent of men and 73 per cent of women.
- Only seven per cent of respondents considered bisexuality to be a 'phase': eight per cent of men and six per cent of women.

Data from Interviews

Two young men discussed the issue of bisexuality during an interview, stating:

“I’m not sure about bisexuality, maybe it’s seen as being more acceptable than coming out as gay.” (Young man.)

“I think bisexuality is okay. It’s just like being gay.” (Young man.)

Discussion

Parents' Friend (1995) cited a study proposing a four-stage model for coming out as bisexual. Stage one: initial confusion at being attracted to both sexes. Stage two: finding and applying the label 'bisexual'. Stage three: accepting yourself and coming out as bisexual. Stage four: continued uncertainty with periods of doubt and confusion. It was suggested that the fourth stage had particular consequences for mental health. The study cited a survey in which 80 per cent identified as bisexual even though they almost exclusively had sexual relationships with one gender and 90 per cent declared their bisexuality was not a transitional identity to coming out as gay or lesbian.

Weatherburn *et al* (1996) outlined the debate around bisexuality, its nature and prevalence. They concluded it was not a unitary concept and was difficult to quantify. For example, some defined bisexuality as an identity and a political statement while others defined it behaviourally. They cited five major studies of sexual identity, two in the United States and three in Britain. Kinsey *et al* (1948) in the United States surveyed 5,300 men and found that 46 per cent had had homosexual experiences (but were not homosexual) while 33 per cent had had male and female partners during their life. Lever *et al* (1989) found that 20 per cent of their 1,450 male sample had had homosexual and heterosexual experiences and 3.4 per cent identified as bisexual. Johnson *et al* (1994) in their British National Study of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (18,876 men and women) found that 6.1 per cent had had a homosexual experience, 3.6 per cent had had a homosexual partner and 3.4 per cent had both male and female partners. In Project Sigma's (1994) survey of 1,633 men, five per cent identified as bisexual and 57 per cent reported their first sexual experience was with a woman. Weatherburn *et al* (1996) surveyed 745 men and found that almost 44 per cent described themselves as bisexual.

Birch (1998) found widespread biphobia among gays and lesbians. Birch identified several common assumptions and myths about bisexuality: that bisexuality was fashionable, that bisexual people had a high sex drive, that they were a HIV risk, that they were suffering from identity confusion and that they were promiscuous. Birch noted the growing bisexual movement of social and support services and how it was challenging the gay and lesbian community and wider society.

In ReachOUT's research project, nine per cent of respondents identified as bisexual, a majority of respondents considered bisexuality to be a sexual identity in its own right and only seven per cent considered bisexuality to be a 'phase'. ReachOUT's findings seem to contrast with the findings of the above studies.

Many gay and lesbian groups and services now include the term bisexual in their service specification, publicity, etc. and this has become the norm. However, bisexuality is still seen more as a label to describe behaviour rather than to describe sexual identity and politics.

3.1.5 Bullying at School

Data from Interviews

The issue of bullying, both being bullied and bullying others, was discussed by several young people during interviews.

“I hated school at the time. I was bullied for being gay by a couple of people. I think they suspected I was gay because I was a bit camp. I just called them names back. They did hit me although I never told the teachers. I thought I could deal with it. Sometimes it used to get to me. One particular lad used to often bully me. He may have been jealous that I was the ‘teachers’ pet’ and had a big group of friends. I suppose he saw me as the weakest and it was obviously an easy thing to bully me about. Everyone gets called gay at school. It’s just one of those terms of abuse. If I’d have reacted differently, maybe it would’ve stopped, but it went on for two years. And I used to bully other people.” (Young man.)

“School was hell. I was bullied for ten years for being gay. I was bullied for being gay before even I knew! The teachers knew and tried to do something about it but they just presumed that I was gay and didn’t give me the chance to talk about it, which I needed to do. They just assumed and acted accordingly. In effect, I was outed by the teachers. They even removed me from the normal school environment to ‘protect me’: I left school five minutes before everyone else and I was put in the remedial class! I resented this. All sorts of things went through my head. It has had a long-term impact. I am quite hard and not easy to get close to emotionally. But I am a stronger person now for it, things don’t phase me.” (Young man.)

“I was jeered for being gay. When I was going through my sexual awakening I began to think I might be gay. But there weren’t any positive role models and nobody ever talked about being gay so it was a long process of shedding all those bad images of it. I spoke to a teacher about it, but he didn’t do anything.” (Young man.)

“A friend of mine came out at school when he was 14 and he got beaten up at the time. People used to surround his house and throw stones, and his father and brother got beaten up.” (Young woman.)

“There was a lot of bullying at school. A lot of my friends were beaten up and ostracised for being gay.” (Young woman.)

“The sort of bullying that happened to me was different. Other than some isolated incidents, I was more ostracised rather than actively bullied. But that is difficult to deal with because you can’t force a group of people to deal with that, you can’t force a group of people to accept someone if they are not going to, especially when they’re young.” (Young woman.)

“Lots of kids used to get beaten up for being gay. You just had to suffer it.” (Young man.)

“I used to get bullied and bully other people. I got suspended for throwing someone out of a second floor window.” (Young man.)

“Teachers used to get beaten up too. They had no control whatsoever.” (Young man.)

“I used to get bullied at school and round where I lived. They all knew and they used to hassle me, spit at me and stuff.” (Young man.)

“I’m out to my closest friends who are female and they are very understanding. I don’t think any of the boys are though, they are very anti-gay. They call people queer and say they hate gay people. They hit people. This has happened to me. I get bullied. I’ve been beaten up at school because of it. When I go into the toilets they hit and kick me, throw me down to the floor, empty my bag and throw it around the place. I think some of the teachers know what is going on but they are just waiting for me to tell them, for my permission to do something about it. But I just ignore it and walk away. I don’t want them to do anything about it.” (Young man.)

Discussion

Trenchard and Warren’s (1984) study of young gay men and lesbians found that 45 per cent had experienced problems at school because of their sexual identity: 58 per cent had been verbally abused and 21 per cent had been physically assaulted.

Fahey’s (1995) study of higher education settings found that 40 per cent of young gay men and lesbians felt isolated, 39 per cent had been verbally abused and four per cent had been physically assaulted.

Bullying and physical abuse were reported as problems for young bisexual, gays and lesbians by 35 per cent of youth workers surveyed (McColl, 1995).

Mason and Palmer’s (1996) national survey of hate crimes revealed that 50 per cent of violent assaults against young bisexuals, gays and lesbians involved fellow students

and 40 per cent occurred at school. Forty-four per cent of harassment was from fellow students, as was 79 per cent of verbal abuse.

Nayak and Kehily (1996) found that homophobic practices were regarded by students and teachers as natural and routine in the developing lives of young gay men (cited in Douglas *et al*, 1997).

Douglas *et al* (1997) surveyed 307 secondary schools in England and Wales and found that 82 per cent of teachers were aware of homophobic verbal bullying and 26 per cent were aware of physical bullying in their schools. Ninety-nine per cent of these schools had a bullying policy but only six per cent of policies made any reference to the needs of bisexual, gay and lesbian students.

Rivers' (1998) study of young bisexuals, gays and lesbians found that 82 per cent had experienced name calling at school, 71 per cent had been ridiculed, 60 per cent had been hit or kicked, 58 per cent had been teased, 59 per cent had the subject of rumours, 49 per cent had experienced theft, 52 per cent had been frightened by a look or stare and 40 per cent had attempted suicide.

Duncan (1999) found widespread sexual bullying of male students aged between 11 and 16 by their peers at school. The study also found "that the term gay was used as a catch-all term of abuse by aggressive male students wishing to highlight any traits they perceived as being undesirable, such as academic success, lack of interest in sport, or lack of aggression." Duncan argued that there was widespread homophobia within schools – not only individual institutions but as a system – because schools were built on the idea of the 'norm'. Duncan also found that "teachers too, sometimes display, usually unwittingly, behaviour that compounds ... difficulties" (*Pink Paper*, 1999c).

Eleven out of the 35 (31 per cent) young people who participated in interviews had experienced bullying at school because of their sexual identity (real or perceived), several knew of other young people who had been bullied in this way and two young men who were bullied used to bully others.

ReachOUT's research project (and others) found that bullying at school took the form of verbal and physical abuse, harassment and being ignored and ostracised. However, ReachOUT's research project (and others) revealed a number of issues in addition to the motive behind, and form of, bullying.

These studies revealed that schools and teachers, when dealing with the issue of homophobic bullying, often lacked the institutional framework (i.e. inclusive policies and procedures) to deal with these situations effectively. They also on occasions adopted inappropriate responses, for example, the young man who was placed in remedial classes

to avoid homophobic students. In his case, the teachers effectively outed him, and highlighted his perceived 'difference'.

Although little or no research to date has looked at the consequences of homophobic bullying, for example, on young people's academic attainment at school (or achievements, confidence, mental health, etc. later in life), it seems legitimate to ask whether homophobic bullying at school does affect the academic lives of young bisexuals, gays and lesbians? Manchester's Young Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Peer Support Project, in describing the development of their study clubs stated:

[That] the academic work of young lesbians, gays and bisexuals often suffers as a result of homophobic bullying [and that] the study club offers a peaceful environment for young people to do their homework and receive academic support. Staffed by qualified teachers and peer supporters, the club also supports young people to think about and discuss issues such as coming out and bullying. Central to the work is an understanding that bullying is not necessarily direct. Nonetheless, it can impact powerfully on the lives of young lesbians, gays and bisexuals since it generates fear and a perceived danger to self and sense of self (Hunter *et al.*, 1999).

There have been many tragic consequences of homophobic bullying. For example in 1998, 15-year old Darren Steele committed suicide after "students at his school abused and bullied him, beat him up, and burned him with cigarettes" (Powell, 1999). This case contrasts with that of James Hudson, who was also the victim of homophobic bullying. James' school in Leeds "has no policy or mechanism for dealing with anti-gay bullying so he is now attempting to take legal action against Leeds Grammar School for failing to protect him from anti-gay harassment and violence" (Powell, 1999). The outcome of this case could have consequences for schools across Britain.

Indeed in June 1999, the Department for Education and Employment issued a circular to all headteachers stating that students had a legal right to protection against homophobic bullying in schools and that Headteachers had a clear legal duty to prevent it. The circular stated that "The emotional distress caused by bullying in whatever form – be it racial, or as a result of a child's appearance, behaviour or special education needs, or related to sexual orientation – can prejudice school achievement, lead to lateness or truancy and, in extreme cases, end with suicide." It added that "All teaching and non-teaching staff, including lunchtime supervisors, should be alert to the signs of bullying and act promptly and firmly. Students may see failure to respond to incidents or allegations as tolerating bullying." The circular formalised the Department's earlier policy that indicated that homophobic bullying should be actively tackled in schools (*Pink Paper*, 1999c).

Also see Section 3.9 on homophobia and Section 4.2 on schools.

3.1.6 Commercial Sex Work

Survey Data

- Sixteen per cent of respondents had sold sex for money: 21 per cent of men and nine per cent of women.

Data from Interviews

One young man raised the issue of commercial sex work during an interview:

“A friend of mine is a male prostitute. He hangs about the public toilets. He lets men fuck him and for extra money, he lets them do it unprotected.”

Discussion

Boyer's (1989) study of 47 male prostitutes in the United States found that 70 per cent identified as bisexual or gay and that selling sex was a means of survival for most. The Streetwork Project's New York study of 235 homeless young people between 1987-90 found that 42 per cent identified as bisexual, gay or lesbian, 73 per cent had engaged in prostitution, 57 per cent had been in care and 87 per cent had used drugs (Governor's Commission of Lesbian and Gay Youth, 1994).

A Sigma Research study of 81 commercial sex workers, aged 15-23, found that condoms were used on 84 per cent of occasions involving receptive intercourse with paying partners and on 53 per cent of occasions with non-paying partners (Health Education Authority, 1997).

ReachOUT's research project found that 16 per cent of respondents had sold sex for money: 21 per cent of men and nine per cent of women. It was not possible to ascertain from the survey whether the selling of sex was systematic (i.e. prostitution) or whether they were one-off events. Nor was it possible to ascertain whether it was a result of choice or of coercion and/or need.

However, commercial sex work among bisexual, gay and lesbian youth raises a number of important issues. The central issues seem to be those of consent and power. The issue of consent is controversial. As the selling of sex obviously involves a two-way relationship, the central issue is therefore one of consent and knowledge. Does the young person selling sex freely consent to the arrangement with a full knowledge of its implications or is the selling of sex a result of coercion and/or need (for money, etc.)? Closely associated with the issue of consent is that of power, more specifically, the imbalance of power between the young person and the client. This imbalance of power leaves the young person vulnerable to possible abuse and manipulation. However, young people can manipulate clients for financial and material gain (for example, adults who are lonely, vulnerable, known to be wealthy, etc.)

There are several other important issues surrounding commercial sex work and young people. There is the fact that prostitution is illegal, hence a risk of prosecution and a criminal record (with consequences for later life).

There are personal safety issues, for example, the potential risk from clients who are strangers, dangers from the setting where sex takes place (being alone in the client's home, etc.), the risk of homophobic attacks in public sex environments, etc.

The selling of sex may be associated with alcohol and drug use and abuse. This may lead to dependency and/or it may have an impact on the practice of safer sex, etc.

Potentially, there are sexual health issues associated with the selling of sex: what is the young person's/client's knowledge of HIV, risk factors, safer sex, sexual health, etc. and do they act on this knowledge? Consider for example, the HIV risk for young people engaging in unprotected intercourse for extra money, etc.

Potentially, there are several mental health issues associated with the selling of sex. For example, its impact on young people's self-esteem, how young people subsequently see sex and relationships, the consequences of power imbalance (abuse and manipulation), the consequences of coercion, the mental health implications of dependence on selling sex as a source of income to maintain a certain lifestyle, etc.

3.1.7 Domestic Violence against Young People

Survey Data

- Twenty-one per cent of respondents had experienced domestic violence from lovers or partners: 19 per cent of men and 25 per cent of women.

Discussion

Figure 12 shows the levels of domestic violence against young people.

Figure 12: Levels of Domestic Violence suffered by Young People

	Domestic Violence against Young Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians: ReachOUT's Findings	Domestic Violence against Gays and lesbians (All Ages); Other Studies	Domestic Violence against People (All Ages): General Studies
Men Experiencing Violence	19% (1)		15% (4)
Women Experiencing Violence	25% (2)	20% (3)	24% (5)

Notes: (1) $n = 95$; (2) $n = 65$; (3) Lesbewell (1995); (4) Travis (1999); (5) Boseley (1998) and Travis (1999).

ReachOUT's research project found that domestic violence against bisexual and gay men is slightly higher than the reported level of domestic violence against heterosexual men. Domestic violence against bisexual and lesbian women is about the same as the reported level of domestic violence against heterosexual women.

Also see Section 3.9 on homophobia for other forms of oppression and violence.

3.1.8 Drug Use and Abuse (Prescribed and Recreational Drugs)

Survey Data

- Fifty per cent of respondents had used drugs: 59 per cent of men and 42 per cent of women.
- Fifteen per cent of respondents had used drugs on a weekly basis (from daily to once a week): 37 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women.
- Twenty per cent of respondents had used drugs on a monthly basis (from once to ten times a month): 45 per cent of men and 44 per cent of women.
- Nine per cent of respondents had used drugs on a yearly basis (from once to nine times a year): 17 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women.

Table 14 shows the types of drugs used by respondents.

Table 14: Respondents' Drug Use by Type

	Amphetamines	Amyl Nitrate	Cannabis	Cocaine	Ecstasy	Heroin	LSD
Men	41	47	63	25	33	4	26
Women	13	17	36	8	11		7

Note: $n = 163$

- Thirty-two per cent of respondents had used amphetamines ('speed'): 42 per cent of men and 20 per cent of women.
- Thirty-eight per cent of respondents had used amyl nitrate ('poppers'): 48 per cent of men and 26 per cent of women.
- Fifty-nine per cent of respondents had used cannabis (marijuana): 64 per cent of men and 55 per cent of women.
- Twenty per cent of respondents had used cocaine ('coke'): 26 per cent of men and 12 per cent of women.

- Twenty-six per cent of respondents had used ecstasy: 34 per cent of men and 17 per cent of women.
- Four young men had used heroin.
- Twenty per cent of respondents had used LSD ('acid'): 27 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women.
- Two men had used prescription tranquillisers (diazepam, temazepam and valium), three men had used ketamine, two men had used 'magic' mushrooms, one man had used MDMA and one man had used opium.

Data from Interviews

Several young people raised the issue of drugs during interviews:

"Drugs are common on the club scene. I think it's the club scene that attracts drugs, not being gay. It's an image and fashion thing. One of my friends is seriously into drugs but he controls it rather than the other way round. He is sensible about it and just enjoys it. I do worry about the long-term health effects on him though. Not knowing the long-term effects is worrying. I've never felt as though I had to take them." (Young man.)

"I can't see a difference with heterosexuals [in terms of drug-taking]. I know people who smoke the odd joint [of marijuana] now and again, but that's it." (Young man.)

"A friend of mine has recently moved into drugs. She doesn't do it that often, but she does occasionally and it has built up. She does a little bit more each time. At the moment she does not have the time or money, but at one point it posed a serious risk." (Young woman.)

"I have a friend who does a lot of drugs. He is an addict and has rich parents who throw a lot of money at him. That is why he can do it. He dropped out of university and eventually had to go to a psychiatrist to be assessed. He has a certificate saying that he is psychologically disturbed." (Young woman.)

"I get offered more drugs on the gay scene than the straight [heterosexual] scene." (Young man.)

"I think the drugs thing on the gay scene is a problem, inasmuch as drugs everywhere are a problem. On the gay scene, clubs and stuff, there is peer pressure to take drugs. I am sure that drug-taking is associated with poor self-image." (Young woman.)

Discussion

There were 1,399 drug-related deaths in 1993 and 1,805 deaths in 1996. These figures include young people (Gentleman, 1998).

Parker and Measham's (1994) study of young people's drug use in Northwest England found few differences in drug use in terms of class or gender. However, they found significant differences in terms of ethnic identity with 63 per cent of young Black people using drugs compared to 41 per cent of white young people and only ten per cent of Asian young people (cited in Coleman, 1997).

In Roker's (1995) study of 2,000 young people in Southeast England (aged 11-16), 3.8 per cent had used amphetamines, 18.5 per cent cannabis, 2.7 per cent ecstasy, 1.4 per cent cocaine, 7.2 per cent hallucinogens, 0.9 per cent heroin, 1.1 per cent crack, 4.6 per cent solvents and 1.4 per cent tranquillisers (cited in Coleman, 1997).

Miller and Plant's (1996) study of 7,000 young people in Britain (aged 11-16) found that 40 per cent of these young people had used cannabis and nine per cent had used ecstasy (cited in Coleman, 1997).

A study by Denham Wright (1995), comparing young people's knowledge and experience of drug use over a twenty five year period (1969-94), revealed an increase in the percentage of young people who knew someone who had used drugs from 15 per cent in 1969 to 65 per cent in 1994. Correspondingly, the proportion of young people being offered drugs increased from five to 65 per cent over the same period. The 1994 study concluded that an increasing proportion of young people was in contact with illicit drugs from their early teens, that a greater variety of drugs were available, socially and geographically and that young people expected to enjoy the pleasurable effects of drugs with minimum harm.

It was reported that amphetamines kill almost twice as many people as ecstasy, yet young people still believe that speed is safer. Since 1990 there have been 60 amphetamine-related deaths compared to 35 ecstasy-related deaths (cited in Johnson, 1996).

The Drugs and Dance Survey by Release (1997) questioned 520 people at clubs and raves in London and Southeast England. Ninety-seven per cent of these people had used illegal drugs at some time, 64 per cent had used cannabis and four per cent had injected drugs. Fifty-four per cent had sex with someone they had met at a dance event. Twenty-eight per cent had encountered problems with the police. Thirty per cent of the survey were teenagers (cited in Campbell, 1997a).

A survey by the Home Office Police Research Group (1997) reported that young people in rural areas often felt too embarrassed to request information about drugs for

fear of being labelled and stigmatised by their local communities (cited in Campbell, 1997b).

A survey reported by Mills (1997) found that young people in Britain were more likely to use drugs than their contemporaries in Europe and the United States. The survey found that 40 per cent of 15 year olds had used cannabis, 13 per cent amphetamines (including use by young women as a slimming aid) and eight per cent ecstasy. Experimenting, by mixing and matching drugs, was found to be common. The report concluded that drug use in Britain is viewed and tackled as a law and order issue in contrast to Europe where a health-driven approach predominated.

A study by the Trimbos Institute in the Netherlands found that 41 per cent of 15 year olds in Britain had tried illicit drugs (compared to 34 per cent in the United States and 29 per cent in the Netherlands) (cited in Travis, 1997c).

The Schools Health Education Unit's (1998) survey revealed that 27.4 per cent of young men and women (aged 14-15) in rural areas had some experience of illicit drugs. This compared to 19.2 per cent of young men and 16.6 per cent of young women in urban areas. Drugs were reported to be easily available and cheap in rural areas, there was a wide variety available and being used (including amphetamines, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin and LSD) and boredom was a commonly cited factor for drug use in the rural areas. The study concluded that the idea that drugs were an inner-city problem was outdated (cited in Wilson and Campbell, 1998).

Research by the Home Office found that 45 per cent of those aged 16-29 had used drugs: 0.4 per cent methadone, one per cent crack, one per cent heroin, one per cent steroids, three per cent temazepam, four per cent cocaine, five per cent glue, nine per cent ecstasy, nine per cent 'magic' mushrooms, ten per cent LSD, 14 per cent amyl nitrate, 16 per cent amphetamines and 36 per cent cannabis. The research found drug use peaking among those in their late 20s, yet the research also revealed young people using drugs at an earlier age (cited in Gentleman, 1998). This research accompanied the Government's White Paper, 'Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain' which suggested shifting resources from 'reactive measures' – the police, courts and prisons – (which consumed 62 per cent of the annual drugs budget) to education, prevention and treatment (which consumed only 25 per cent) (cited in Travis, 1998).

Mansfield and Owen (1993) surveyed 196 men (93 per cent gay and 92 per cent HIV positive). Sixty-five per cent had used amphetamines, cocaine, ecstasy and/or LSD. Forty-six per cent of drug users had had penetrative sex without condoms compared to 23 per cent among non-users and 41 per cent reported they were more likely to have unsafe sex while using drugs (cited in Project LSD, 1995).

There was a view among some scientists that drug use – by suppressing the body's immune system – may be responsible for the HIV epidemic. They pointed to the correlation between the increase in drug use from the 1970s and the incidence of HIV in the 1980s. However, studies of men using poppers for example did not reveal any link.

Furthermore, no link was found between popper use and the development of HIV. The studies concluded however that men who used amyl nitrate during unprotected anal intercourse were more likely to become infected (cited in Alcorn, 1994).

Project Sigma's sample of gay men's drug use in the East Sussex (Brighton) area found that 57 per cent had used ecstasy, 52 per cent LSD, 23 per cent amphetamines, 16 per cent cocaine, 13 per cent amyl nitrate and 11 per cent cannabis (cited in Project LSD, 1995).

The results of Project LSD's pilot need assessment of 287 people (eight per cent bisexual and 56 per cent gay or lesbian) at the 1994 Winter Pride Festival is shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Percentage of Project LSD Study Respondents Using Substances Every Month

	Alcohol	Tobacco	Cannabis	Ecstasy	Amphetamines
Gay Men	81	48	41	19	13
Lesbians	86	52	38	9	9

	Amyl Nitrate	Cocaine	LSD	Tranquillisers	Prozac
Gay Men	32	5	8	18	8
Lesbians	9	3	4	14	3

Source: Project LSD (1995).

The survey revealed that lesbians started to experiment with drugs at an earlier age but that gay men used drugs for a longer period. Fifty-three per cent used two or more drugs at the same time (cited in Project LSD, 1995).

Project Sigma's sample of 1,167 gay men's drug use at the 1995 Pride Festival found that 84 per cent had used alcohol, 51 per cent amyl nitrate, 48 per cent cannabis, 20 per cent ecstasy, 18 per cent amphetamines, ten per cent cocaine, ten per cent LSD and one per cent heroin (cited in Project LSD, 1995).

In Project LSD's survey of 113 gay men at the 1995 Winter Pride Festival, 42 per cent reported using amphetamines, cocaine, ecstasy or LSD during sex and 29 per cent experienced difficulties in practising safer sex while using drugs (cited in Project LSD, 1995).

The *Gay Times*' (1996) survey of 685 gay men found high levels of drug use and experimentation. Half of these men were aged 23-32, one third earned between £16-25,000 and one quarter between £6-15,000. Ten per cent were students or unemployed, around half of these men lived in London and 16 per cent lived in Southeast England. Seventy-six per cent of these men had tried cannabis and one third used it regularly. Forty-eight per cent had tried ecstasy and 20 per cent used it regularly. Forty per cent had tried cocaine and 20 per cent used it regularly. Forty-eight per cent had tried LSD. Twenty-five per cent had tried heroin. Eighty per cent had tried amyl nitrate and 25 per

cent used it regularly. One-third of these men used two or more drugs at any one time. The survey also revealed a strong desire for education, information and harm-reduction measures rather than the orthodox 'Just Say No' and 'Drugs Are Evil' campaigns.

A survey by Lifeline in Manchester produced similar results to the *Gay Times* survey. Of 300 gay men – mostly in their 20s and working or middle class (earning between £5-25,000) – over a half had used recreational drugs. Seventy per cent had used cannabis, 60 per cent used ecstasy, 66 per cent used amphetamines, 47 per cent used LSD, 37 per cent cocaine, 28 per cent 'magic' mushrooms, 58 per cent cigarettes and 95 per cent alcohol. Ninety-six per cent of these men reported few problems with their drug use (cited in *Gay Times*, 1996).

An inquest in 1998 concluded that the interaction between the anti-HIV drug Ritonavir and the recreational drug ecstasy had caused the death of a gay clubber (cited in Gibbons, 1998).

Gibson's (1989) study suggested that substance abuse began in early adolescence when young people experienced conflict around their sexual identity. Drug (and alcohol) use reduced the pain of external conflict and helped young people to overcome their internalised inhibitions. Prolonged substance abuse contributed to their problems and magnified suicidal feelings (Golding, 1997).

Muir-Mackenzie (1996) conducted a survey of 55 people at the 'Health of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Nation' Conference. Twenty-seven per cent were under 25 years of age. Fifty-three per cent of the respondents had used drugs: 20 per cent amyl nitrate, 11 per cent ecstasy, five per cent cocaine, 17 per cent amphetamines, two per cent heroin and 39 per cent cannabis.

Prajapati (1997) studied the drug use and knowledge of 96 young people: 50 were under 25 years of age, 55 were gay men, 29 were lesbians and 13 were bisexual, 69 were white and 14 were African Caribbean or Asian. Seventy-nine of these young people accessed the scene and 67 had used drugs (seven on a daily basis, 16 weekly and 22 monthly). Twenty-two young people cited peer pressure as an important factor in their drug use. Fifty-five felt there was not enough information for young bisexuals, gay men and lesbians on drug issues and most gained their knowledge of drug issues from friends and the media.

ReachOUT's research project found that 50 per cent of respondents had used drugs – 32 per cent amphetamines, 38 per cent amyl nitrate, 59 per cent cannabis, 20 per cent cocaine, 26 per cent ecstasy, four young men heroin and 20 per cent LSD – 35 per cent on a weekly or monthly basis. Men were three times as likely to have used cocaine, ecstasy, LSD, poppers and speed compared to women.

Drug use is common among young people whatever their sexual identity, see Figure 13.

Figure 13: Drug Use among Young People

	Young Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians: ReachOUT's Findings	Gays and Lesbians (All Ages): Other Studies	Young People: General Studies
Drug Users	50% (1)	53% (2)	45% (3)

Notes: (1) $n = 163$; (2) Project Sigma (1994), Project LSD (1994), Project Sigma (1995), Project LSD (1995), Muir-Mackenzie (1996); (3) Home Office (1998) cited in Travis (1998).

However, there was evidence that young people who participated in ReachOUT's research project were *more likely to have used certain types of drugs* than their heterosexual counterparts in the Home Office (1998) study, see Figure 14.

Figure 14: Types of Drug Use among Young People

Drug Type	Young Bisexuals, Gays and Lesbians: ReachOUT's Findings	Gays and Lesbians (All Ages): Other Studies	Young People: General Study (3)
Amphetamines	32%	17%	16%
Amyl Nitrate	38%	26%	14%
Cannabis	59%	35%	36%
Cocaine	20% (1)	9% (2)	4%
Ecstasy	26%	27%	9%
Heroin	2.4%	1.5%	1%
LSD	20%	33%	10%

Notes: (1) $n = 163$; (2) Project Sigma (1994), Project LSD (1994), Project Sigma (1995), Project LSD (1995), Muir-Mackenzie (1996); (3) Home Office (1998) cited in Travis (1998).

There is not enough evidence to try to attempt a definitive answer to the question as to why young bisexuals, gays and lesbians in Reading were more likely to be using certain types of drugs than their heterosexual counterparts in the Home Office (1998) study (*between two and five times more likely*). As to why there is a high level of drug use among young bisexuals, gays and lesbians, four factors seem likely: the high level of use among young people generally, the fact that the gay and lesbian scene is based around bars, pubs and clubs, the 'Ab Fab' lifestyle factor and the coping factor.

There is an increase in drug use among young people generally, as identified by Denham Wright (1995) and several other studies. The factors underlying this trend will influence and impact on young people's use of drugs regardless of their sexual identity.

The gay and lesbian scene is predominantly based around bars, clubs, and pubs and drug use is closely linked to the club scene. The club scene is especially popular among young gay men, hence the higher level of drug use among this group. This may also account for the higher levels of use of cocaine, ecstasy and speed (popular drugs used in clubs) by this group.

There is evidence that an important factor in young people's drug use is the 'Ab Fab' lifestyle factor as with alcohol (see p.48). There is also evidence that drug use is a coping mechanism for some young people, as found by Gibson (1998) and as with alcohol (see p.48).