

# CONTEXTUAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH FEELING THAT FIRST INTERCOURSE WAS TOO EARLY AMONG BELGIAN ADOLESCENTS

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## BACKGROUND

First sexual intercourse is a major event in a young person's life marking the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Early sexual intercourse, an older partner and alcohol or drug use have been associated with higher risk of non-use of contraceptive methods and consequently with higher risks of STI and unplanned pregnancies [1-3]. Those factors have also been associated with regrets about the timing of 1<sup>st</sup> intercourse [2-4]. Studies have also documented that a negative first experience was likely to impact sexual development and maybe future sexual life [4].

We examined associations of contextual factors around the first intercourse with the feeling that first intercourse was too early.

## METHODS

Within the 2014 HBSC survey, data were collected among 2,015 French-speaking Belgian adolescents aged 16-20 who had already had intercourse (50.1% of the 16-20 year olds). Variable of interest was the feeling on the timing of their first intercourse and was dichotomized. Adolescents who declared they would rather have had first intercourse later or they did not really want to have intercourse were considered as reporting first intercourse was too early. Reference group included adolescents who reported they wished first intercourse happened earlier, those for whom it happened at the right moment or they did not think about.

Using logistic regression model, associations with early sexual intercourse (before 16 years), age difference between partners, contraceptive use (including condom), number of subsequent intercourse and sociodemographic factors (as potential confounders) were assessed. Interactions with gender, age, age at first sexual intercourse and age difference between partners were tested. Since interaction between gender and age at first intercourse was statistically borderline ( $p=0.07$ ), analyses were stratified among boys and girls.

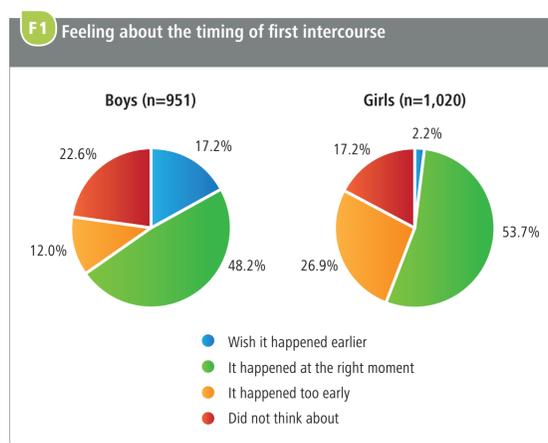
T1 Sample characteristics according to the gender – HBSC 2014 in Belgium (French)			
	Boys	Girls	P
	%	%	
<b>Age at interview</b>	(n=974)	(n=1,033)	<0.001
16 years	24.8	26.6	
17 years	30.4	34.5	
18 years	21.1	20.9	
19-20 years	23.7	18.0	
<b>Family structure</b>	(n=962)	(n=1,029)	<0.05
2 biological parents	61.4	59.8	
Blended family	26.7	26.4	
Lone-parent family	9.3	9.2	
Others*	2.6	4.6	
<b>Family Affluence Scale (FAS)</b>	(n=955)	(n=1,018)	0.11
High	29.1	26.9	
Medium	49.4	49.2	
Low	21.5	23.9	
<b>Age at 1<sup>st</sup> intercourse</b>	(n=957)	(n=1,021)	0.54
≥16 years	56.4	55.0	
<16 years	43.6	45.0	
<b>Contraception at 1<sup>st</sup> intercourse</b>	(n=936)	(n=1,015)	0.27
Yes	94.8	93.6	
No	5.2	6.4	
<b>Age difference between partners</b>	(n=920)	(n=1,009)	<0.001
Younger partner	26.8	5.5	
Same age partner	37.3	23.1	
Older partner	35.9	71.4	
<b>Number of sexual intercourse</b>	(n=938)	(n=1,015)	<0.001
> 1 intercourse	86.1	94.4	
1 intercourse	13.9	5.6	

\* adolescents who lived with other relatives, in a foster family ...

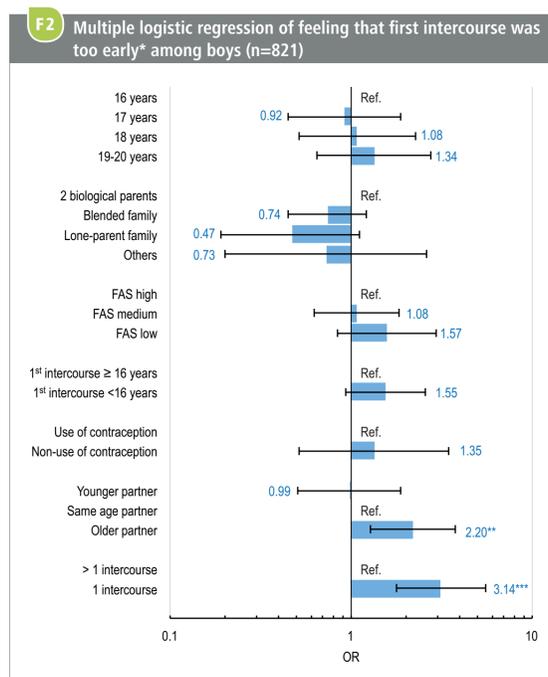
## RESULTS

Half of the sample were boys; girls were younger than boys (Table 1). The proportion of adolescents who had had first intercourse with a younger partner was 5 times higher among boys, while proportion of those who had had first experience with an older partner was twice as high among girls. Boys were twice as likely to report they had had only one sexual intercourse as girls.

One in five adolescents (19.7%) reported first intercourse was too early (16.1% would rather have had first intercourse later and 3.6% did not really want to have intercourse). This proportion was twice as high among girls (Figure 1).



After adjustment, first intercourse with an older partner and no subsequent intercourse were associated with feeling that first intercourse was too early among boys compared with those who wished it happened earlier, those for whom it happened at the right moment and those who did not think about (Figure 2). Older girls, those who reported an early sexual intercourse, non-use of contraception and no subsequent intercourse, were more prone to report feeling that first intercourse was too early compared with those who reported other feelings (Figure 3).



\* Reference group included adolescents who reported they wished first intercourse happened earlier, those for whom that it happened at the right moment, or those who did not think about.

## LIMITATION

- No data were collected about other important dimensions such as the type of relationship at 1<sup>st</sup> intercourse (casual or romantic), peer and/or partner's pressure, level of willingness, drug and/or alcohol use ...
- Retrospective report data can be subject to social desirability or memory bias.

## CONCLUSION

Feeling that first intercourse was too early was frequently reported, especially by girls. Among them, such a feeling was associated with sexual risk behaviours. The timing of first intercourse is part of a broader concept that refers to sexual competence or readiness. This concept covers other major dimensions such as autonomy of decision (alcohol use, peer and partner pressure) and level of willingness of both partners. Future research is needed to explore first sexual intercourse within this broader framework.

## MAIN MESSAGES

- Having a first intercourse when they did not actually feel ready could place adolescents at higher risk of non-use of contraception (including condom), especially girls.
- Sexual health education programs should help adolescents to assess their wantedsness to engage in sexual intercourse and to free themselves from any pressure.

## REFERENCES

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