

Ireland Consent Research 2021

Sexual behaviour and sexual consent
Understandings and attitudes

Adam May Language

Karen Hand Strategy & Research

David Cullen Opinions Research

Research objectives

To understand public:

- **attitudes and associations**
- **values and priorities**
- **hopes and barriers**

To measure:

- **scale of support for values and principles**
- **indicators of confusion or complexity**

Research structure

- **Research and campaign review**
- **Stakeholder interviews**
- **Qualitative groups**
- **Quantitative poll**

Consent principles

To structure our research we have considered three core principles for consent:

- **Individual agency**
- **Mutual respect**
- **Shared willingness**

Consent practice

To structure our research we have broken down the practice of consent into four parts:

Consent practice

To structure our research we have broken down the practice of consent into four parts:

- **Knowing what you want**
- **Sharing what you want**
- **Experiencing what you want**
- **Changing what you want**

Ireland Consent Research 2021

Sexual behaviour and sexual consent
Understandings and attitudes

Qualitative interviews and groups

Karen Hand - Strategy & Research

Ireland Consent Research 2021

Sexual behaviour and sexual consent
Understandings and attitudes

Quantitative poll

Survey of nationally representative sample of adults
Conducted by *Opinions* September 2021

A snapshot of where we are currently

Public values and understanding of consent

The potential for change

Public support for values and principles underpinning consent



- 9-in-10 women and 8-in-10 men agree that **everyone has the right to change their mind at any point during sex.**

The potential for change

Public support for values and principles underpinning consent



- 9-in-10 women and 8-in-10 men agree that **everyone has the right to change their mind at any point during sex.**



- Majority of 9-in-10 consider **mutual respect, trust and shared willingness to be very or extremely important between partners**

The potential for change

Public support for values and principles underpinning consent



- **77%** agree that sexual activity is **consensual** when **each person has equal power to control the situation**

The potential for change

Public support for values and principles underpinning consent



- 77% agree that sexual activity is **consensual** when each person has equal power to control the situation



- 75% agree that consent applies to any **unwanted sexual behaviour** and that better understanding of consent will **help equality between women and men.**

A snapshot of where we are currently

**How would you describe
consent in Ireland?**

A snapshot of where we are currently
How would you describe consent?



- An overwhelming majority **70%** see a **problem with sexual consent in Ireland.**

A snapshot of where we are currently
How would you describe consent?



- An overwhelming majority **70%** see a **problem with sexual consent in Ireland**. Consent is seen as a problem by far more **women 76%** than **men 63%**

A snapshot of where we are currently

What contributes to the problem?

A snapshot of where we are currently

What contributes to our problem with sexual consent?

- Some people think that **consent can be ignored** – that ‘no’ really means ‘maybe’
- **Alcohol limits people’s ability** to consent to sexual activity
- People do not understand that **consent can be withdrawn as well as given**
- People are **not good at talking** clearly about sex and consent

A snapshot of where we are currently

What contributes to our problem with sexual consent?

- People **lack the confidence to pause a sexual encounter** if they feel uncomfortable
- **Pornography creates unrealistic expectations** that adds to pressure to go further
- There's **social pressure to go further** than people are comfortable with
- **People are confused** about what constitutes full consent

A snapshot of where we are currently

Complexity and confusion

Two people meet **through a dating site**, when one initiates sex the other person says to stop but **doesn't resist physically**

Two people meet on a night of drinking, **only one of them is very drunk** and they have sex

A college student at a **party is not comfortable** with the way a sexual encounter is going but does not say stop.

A person **does not enjoy a sexual encounter**, but doesn't say stop so as not to upset the other person

A spouse **no longer feels attracted to or interested** in having sex with their partner but agrees to do so anyway

Two people meet on a night of drinking, **they are both drunk and have sex.**

Two people agree to have sex. One of **them regrets that** it happened afterwards.

SOUNDS
CONSENSUAL

MAY OR MAY
NOT BE

DOESN'T SOUND
CONSENSUAL



Scale



SOUNDS
CONSENSUAL

MAY OR MAY
NOT BE

DOESN'T SOUND
CONSENSUAL

I DON'T
KNOW

Two people meet through a dating site, when one initiates sex the other person says to stop but doesn't resist physically



Two people meet on a night of drinking, only one of them is very drunk and they have sex



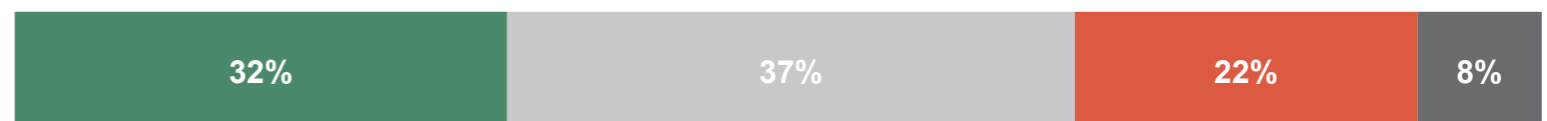
A college student at a party is not comfortable with the way a sexual encounter is going but does not say stop.



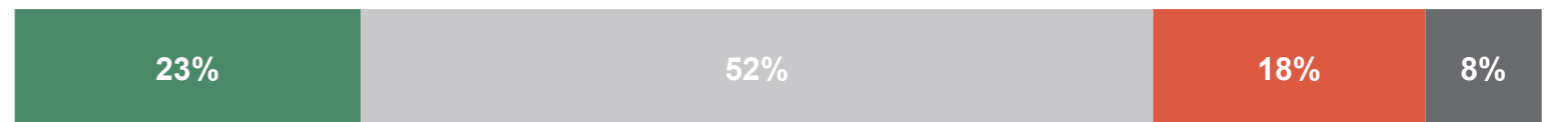
A person does not enjoy a sexual encounter, but doesn't say stop so as not to upset the other person



A spouse no longer feels attracted to or interested in having sex with their partner but agrees to do so anyway



Two people meet on a night of drinking, they are both drunk and have sex.



Two people agree to have sex. One of them regrets that it happened afterwards.



All adults

SOUNDS
CONSENSUAL

MAY OR MAY
NOT BE

DOESN'T SOUND
CONSENSUAL

I DON'T
KNOW

Two people meet through a dating site, when one initiates sex the other person says to stop but doesn't resist physically



Two people meet on a night of drinking, only one of them is very drunk and they have sex



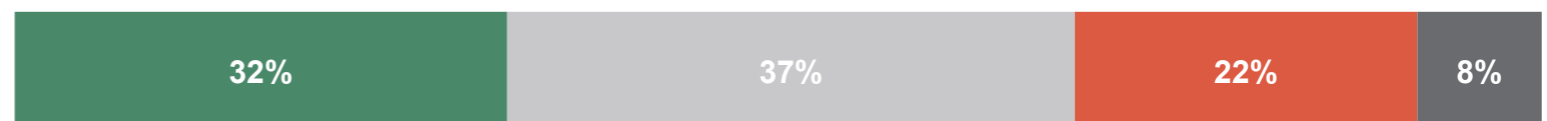
A college student at a party is not comfortable with the way a sexual encounter is going but does not say stop.



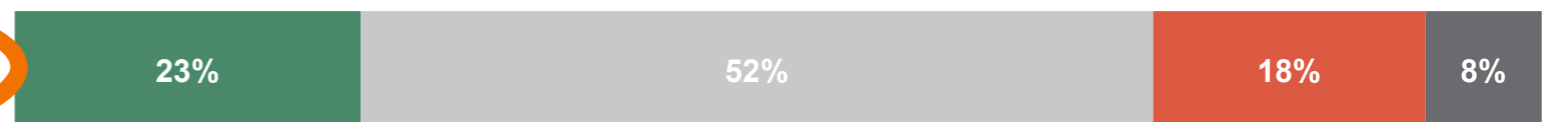
A person does not enjoy a sexual encounter, but doesn't say stop so as not to upset the other person



A spouse no longer feels attracted to or interested in having sex with their partner but agrees to do so anyway



Two people meet on a night of drinking, they are both drunk and have sex.



Two people agree to have sex. One of them regrets that it happened afterwards.



All adults

SOUNDS
CONSENSUAL

MAY OR MAY
NOT BE

DOESN'T SOUND
CONSENSUAL

I DON'T
KNOW

Two people meet through a dating site, when one initiates sex the other person says to stop but doesn't resist physically



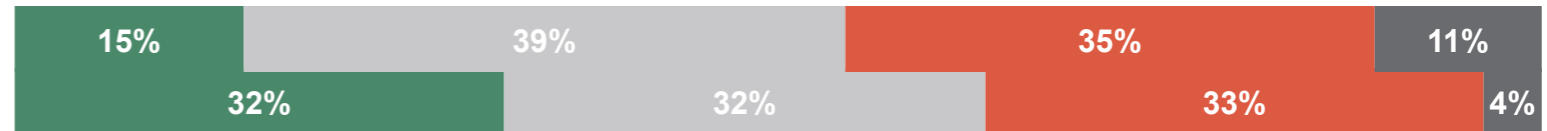
Two people meet on a night of drinking, only one of them is very drunk and they have sex



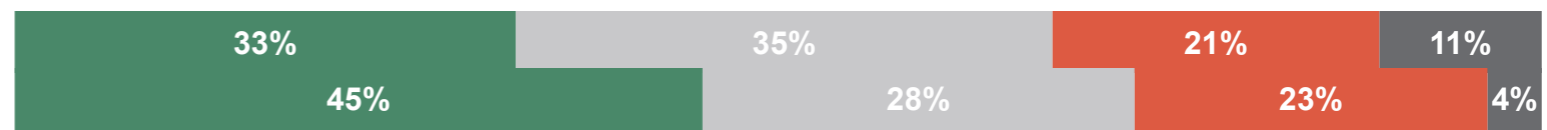
A college student at a party is not comfortable with the way a sexual encounter is going but does not say stop.



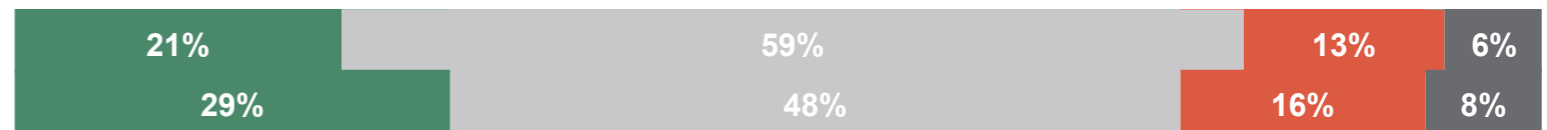
A person does not enjoy a sexual encounter, but doesn't say stop so as not to upset the other person



A spouse no longer feels attracted to or interested in having sex with their partner but agrees to do so anyway



Two people meet on a night of drinking, they are both drunk and have sex.



Two people agree to have sex. One of them regrets that it happened afterwards.



Female <35

Male <35

A snapshot of where we are currently

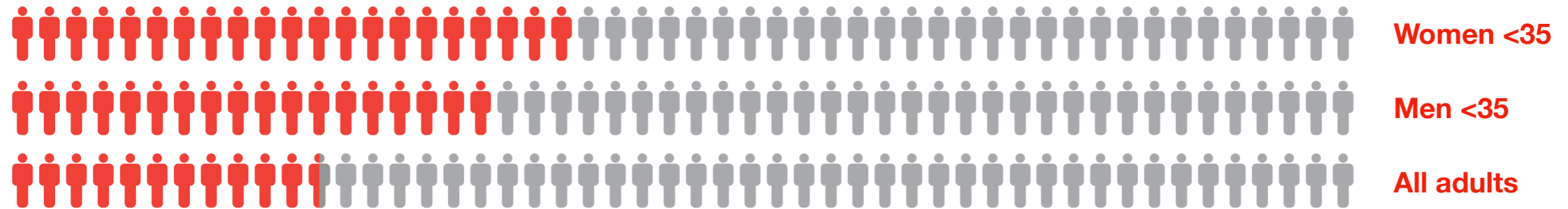
Understanding personal likes/dislikes

A snapshot of where we are currently
Knowing what you want and don't want



- 23% people say they are not sure they understand their own sexual likes and dislikes.

A snapshot of where we are currently
Knowing what you want and don't want



- 23% people say they are not sure they understand their own sexual likes and dislikes. **This increases to 42% for younger women and 36% for younger men.**

A snapshot of where we are currently
Knowing what you want and don't want



- 23% people are not sure they understand their own sexual likes and dislikes. **This increases to 42% for younger women and 36% for younger men.**



- 25% people are not sure they understand their partner's sexual likes and dislikes.

A snapshot of where we are currently
Knowing what you want and don't want



- 23% people are not sure they understand their own sexual likes and dislikes. **This increases to 42% for younger women and 36% for younger men.**



- 25% people are not sure they understand their partner's sexual likes and dislikes. **This increases to 30% for younger men.**

A snapshot of where we are currently

Sources of information

The potential for change

Where we get information and where we should get information

- Secondary schools, third level education, friends, family and the internet are considered the **most common sources** of information about consent.

The potential for change

Where we get information and where we should get information

- Secondary schools, third level education, friends, family and the internet are considered the **most common sources** of information about consent.
- When people are asked where they think are the best places to learn, people rate **state education system; primary, secondary and third level** important along with **parents** and **state bodies** then **NGOs**.

The potential for change

Where we get information and where we should get information

- Secondary schools, third level education, friends, family and the internet are considered the **most common sources** of information about consent.
- When people are asked where they think are the best places to learn, people rate all **education system; primary, secondary and third level** important along with **parents** and **state bodies** then NGOs.
- There is an age split about **friends** and **digital media**, with younger people considering them better places than older people.

A snapshot of where we are currently

Communicating consent

A snapshot of where we are currently

What are considered acceptable signals of consent?



- **7-in-10** see **verbal expression** as important and acceptable way to understand willingness to be sexual.

A snapshot of where we are currently

What are considered acceptable signals of consent?



- 7-in-10 see **verbal expression** as important and acceptable way to understand willingness to be sexual.



- A large minority of **37%** see **body language** as an acceptable way to understand willingness to have sex.

A snapshot of where we are currently

What are considered acceptable signals of consent?



- 7-in-10 see **verbal expression** as important and acceptable way to understand willingness to be sexual.



- A large minority of **37%** see **body language** as an acceptable way to understand willingness to have sex.

- Significant minorities agree that **having had sex previously, flirting or not clearly objecting** signal willingness to be sexual.

A snapshot of where we are currently

Difficulties communicating

A snapshot of where we are currently
Embarrassment, awkwardness and age



- **25%** people agree **‘talking ruins the mood’**

A snapshot of where we are currently
Embarrassment, awkwardness and age



- **25%** people agree ‘**talking ruins the mood**’. This increases to **39%** for younger men.

A snapshot of where we are currently
Embarrassment, awkwardness and age



Men <35
All adults

- 25% people agree ‘talking ruins the mood’. This increases to 39% for younger men.



- **28% people agree that they wouldn’t know how to talk about their sexual likes and dislikes with a partner.**

A snapshot of where we are currently
Embarrassment, awkwardness and age



- 25% people agree ‘talking ruins the mood’. This increases to 39% for younger men.



- **28% people agree that they wouldn’t know how to talk about their sexual likes and dislikes with a partner. This increases to 39% for younger men.**

A snapshot of where we are currently
Embarrassment, awkwardness and age



- **35%** people say that **embarrassment would stop them talking** about their sexual likes and dislikes with a partner.

A snapshot of where we are currently
Embarrassment, awkwardness and age



- **35%** people say that **embarrassment would stop them talking** about their sexual likes and dislikes with a partner. **This increases to 41% for younger women and men.**

A snapshot of where we are currently

Consideration of partner

A snapshot of where we are currently

Personal opinions and approach to consent



- **3-in-4** majority see their own sexual experience as dependent on their partner's enjoyment **'I'd prefer to stop if I suspect my partner is not enjoying sex'**.

A snapshot of where we are currently

Personal opinions and approach to consent



- **3-in-4** majority see their own sexual experience as dependent on their partner's enjoyment 'I'd prefer to stop if I suspect my partner is not enjoying sex'.



- **9-in-10** agree it's important that '**your partner does not feel regret afterwards**'. A majority of people put their partner's pleasure and lack of regret ahead of their own pleasure and lack of regret.

A snapshot of where we are currently

Personal opinions and approach to consent



- For a **1-in-5** minority, **their own sexual experience is more important than their partner's lack of enjoyment** agreeing that 'I'd probably keep going even if I suspect my partner is not enjoying sex'.

A snapshot of where we are currently

Personal opinions and approach to consent



- For a **1-in-5** minority, **their own sexual experience is more important than their partner’s lack of enjoyment** agreeing that ‘I’d probably keep going even if I suspect my partner is not enjoying sex’. **This increases to 2-in-5 younger men.**

A snapshot of where we are currently

What could change?

The potential for change

Who could/should do more?



- **84%** agree we need **age-appropriate sex education** in all schools

The potential for change

Who could/should do more?



- 84% agree we need **age-appropriate sex education** in all schools



- 60% say consent is a **responsibility for all society** and needs **Government action**

The potential for change

Who could/should do more?



- 84% agree we need **age-appropriate sex education** in all schools



- 60% say consent is a **responsibility for all society** and needs **Government action**



- **38%** women and men say **they would sign up** to a **sexuality and consent course** if it was available.

A snapshot of where we are currently

What are the wider benefits?

The potential

What does the public see as benefits of addressing consent



- **81%** agree talking about consent is a real opportunity for people in Ireland to have a **more healthy relationship with sex and sexuality**

The potential

What does the public see as benefits of addressing consent



- **81%** agree talking about consent is a real opportunity for people in Ireland to have a **more healthy relationship with sex and sexuality**



- **78%** agree a better understanding of consent would help people **deal with sexual encounters they don't enjoy**

The potential

What does the public see as benefits of addressing consent



- **81%** agree talking about consent is a real opportunity for people in Ireland to have a **more healthy relationship with sex and sexuality**



- **78%** agree a better understanding of consent would help people **deal with sexual encounters they don't enjoy**



- **72%** agree a better understanding of consent will **help equality between women and men**

Ireland Consent Research 2021

Sexual behaviour and sexual consent
Understandings and attitudes

Adam May Language

Karen Hand Strategy & Research

David Cullen Opinions Research