

Trojan/SIECCAN Sexual Health of Canadian University Students Study: Perceptions of Sexual Health, Concern about STIs and Unplanned Pregnancy, and Rates and Predictors of Condom Use

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This report is based on the February 2019 Trojan/SIECCAN study of the sexual health of 1,500 Canadian university students who completed a 64-item online survey administered by the Leger polling firm. In the following analyses we compare different groups, looking at the percentages of people who responded in a certain way (e.g., the percentage of people who said “yes” or “no” when asked if they had an orgasm at their last sexual encounter) and whether those people differ depending on another variable (e.g., whether they consumed cannabis prior to having sex). To do this, we used chi-square analyses to determine whether there were significant differences at the $p < .05$ level. In the text below, when we report that one group was “more/less likely” to report a behaviour or outcome, that groups “did/did not differ”, or that there was “an association” we are referring to statistically significant differences and associations.

For the purposes of the data analysis below where comparisons are made by relationship category, single individuals are contrasted with casually dating individuals, and individuals in more serious relationships (serious dating relationships, cohabiting, engaged, and married combined).

Key messages are summarized below.

- University students feel positively about their sexual health - Overall, two-thirds of the sample perceived their sexual health to be “very good” or better. Eight out of 10 participants (82.2%) reported that they were happy or very happy with their sexual lives, regardless of whether or not they were sexually active. Those who feel positively about their sexual health are more likely to feel happy about their sexual lives overall, regardless of whether or not they are sexually active.
- Many participants indicated that they were “not at all concerned” about contracting a sexually transmitted infection. Women, in particular, reported little concern. Almost one-half of women indicated that they were “not at all concerned” about contracting an STI; significantly more women than men reported this – 43.4% vs. 29.7%.
 - Women and men who were single and casually dating and women and men who reported more than one sexual partner over the past year were more likely to be

concerned about STI; although relationship status may be an unreliable indicator of STI risk for many university students.

- Women who were very concerned about STI infection were more likely to use a condom at last penis-vagina intercourse (PVI); concern about STI infection and pregnancy were NOT associated with condom use in men.
- Given the high prevalence of STI in this age category, condom use was concerning low. About one-half of participants reported condom use at last PVI. Men were more likely to report that they used a condom at last PVI than did women (60.3% vs 46.4%). Compared to the TROJAN/SIECCAN University Student Sexual Health Study conducted in 2013 – the proportion of men and women reporting condom use at last PVI has not changed significantly (<https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/canadian-university-students-say-they-take-sexual-health-seriously-but-condom-use-and-knowledge-low-trojan-study-finds-513131181.html>). This, despite the fact that STI prevalence remains high and reported rates of STI continue to increase.
- Most participants reported that the main reason they used a condom was for birth control (45.5%); about one-third (38.1%) reported that the main reason was equally birth control and STI prevention. Few participants (16.4%) reported that the most important reason they used a condom was for STI prevention.
- Condom use at last PVI was more common among men and women who used an app like Tinder or Grindr to connect with their last partner, among those who reported drinking one or more alcoholic beverages before sex, among those who were in single (compared to casually dating or seriously involved), and among those who reported more than one sexual partner over the past year. Respondents use of condoms at last PVI was significantly associated with their relationship status, condom use less likely among participants in more serious relationships.
- Condom use was significantly less common among men who reported using online pornography once per week or more often. This may be because pornography infrequently depicts condom use in sexual encounters; porn may therefore be influencing men's safer sex decision making. However, frequency of online porn use was not associated with condom use among women.
- Condom use was not associated with sexual difficulties in either gender - i.e., using a condom was not associated with erectile difficulties, vaginal dryness, pain, or difficulty with orgasm.
- Also consistent with the previous Trojan/SIECCAN studies, there was no difference in pleasure reported for last PVI depending on whether condoms were used, for either gender. In other words, using condoms does not appear to negatively impact respondents' level of pleasure during sex. Furthermore, using a condom at last PVI was not associated with the likelihood that respondents reported having an orgasm during their most recent sexual encounter. In addition, the results indicate that the use of condoms at last PVI is not associated with respondents' level of overall sexual satisfaction in their current relationship.

Perception of Sexual Health

Men and women perceived their sexual health similarly. Specifically, 27.4% of women and 32.0% of men indicated that their sexual health was “excellent”, and 34.6% of women 33.5% of men indicated that their sexual health was “very good.”

Respondents were largely very satisfied with their sexual lives. Specifically, 8 out of 10 participants (82.2%) reported that they were happy or very happy with their sexual lives, regardless of whether or not they were sexually active. One quarter (27.5%) reported they were very happy with their sexual life. There were no gender differences.

Participants in more serious relationships (seriously dating, cohabiting, engaged, or married) were the most likely to report that they were very happy with their sexual lives.

Ratings of sexual health were strongly related to overall happiness with sexual life, regardless of whether or not respondents were sexually active. For example, 56.8% of men who indicated their sexual health was “excellent” indicated that they were “very happy” with the sexual aspects of their life, only 15.3% of men who rated their sexual health as less than excellent indicated that they were “very happy” with the sexual aspects of their life. The same pattern of results was found for women. For example, 55.7% of women who indicated their sexual health was “excellent” indicated that they were “very happy” with sexual aspects of their life, only 16.2% of men who rated their sexual health as less than excellent indicated that they were “very happy” with the sexual aspects of their life.

Concern about Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) and Unplanned Pregnancy

Many participants indicated that they were “not at all concerned” about contracting an STI. However, women were less concerned than men, overall. In particular, women were more likely than men to indicate that they were “not at all concerned” – 43.4% vs. 29.7%.

One-third of men (31.1%) indicated that they were “very concerned” about contracting an STI, compared to 16.4% of women (also significantly different).

Men and women were more similar in terms of their concern about unplanned pregnancy. About one-third of men and women (30.6% and 27.1%) were “not at all concerned” about unplanned pregnancy. Men were more likely to be “very concerned” about unplanned pregnancy than were women (28.0% vs. 20.8%).

Women and men who had more than one sexual partner over the past year were more likely to report that they were “very concerned” about contracting an STI (women = 21.8% of those with more than one partner were very concerned, compared to 9.4% of women who had one partner; men = 37.9% of those with more than one partner were very concerned, compared to 17.4% of those who had one partner).

Women who had one partner over the past year were much more likely to say that they were “not at all concerned” about contracting an STI (57.0%), in comparison to women who had more than one partner (23.5%). Women in serious relationships were also more likely to say that they were “not at all concerned” about STI (58.3%) compared to women who were single (33%) or casually dating (22.8%).

Men who had one partner over the past year were much more likely to indicate they were “not at all concerned” about contracting an STI compared to men who reported having more than one partner (41.0% vs. 20.6%). Men in serious relationships were also almost much more likely to say that they were “not at all concerned” about STI (40.2%) compared to men who were single (29.8%) or casually dating (15.1%).

Women who were single and casually dating were more likely to report that they were “very concerned” (20.9% and 23.5%) about contracting an STI than women who were seriously dating, cohabitating, engaged, or married (10.6%).

However, men who reported having more than one partner were more likely to report being “very concerned” about pregnancy, compared to those who reported only one partner (31.4% vs. 20.5%). Single men were also more likely to report that they were not at all concerned about pregnancy (40.3%) compared to casually dating (21.9%) or seriously involved men (26.7%).

Among men, concern about STI or pregnancy was NOT related to condom use last sex (60% reported condom use regardless of STI concern or pregnancy concern).

However, women who were “very concerned” about contracting an STI were more likely to report condom use (58.6%) compared to women who were less than “very concerned” about STI (44.4%). Women who were “very concerned” about unplanned pregnancy were also more likely to report condom use (57.7%) compared to women who were less than “very concerned” (43.7%).

Condom Use at Last PVI

Men and women were similar in their reports about frequency of condom use. One quarter (25.5% of women and 28.6% of men) indicated that they “always” used a condom, one-fifth

(18.5% of women and 21.2% of men) indicated that they “often” use a condom. However, women were more likely than men to report that they “never” use a condom (25.9% vs. 15.3%).

Men were more likely to report that they used a condom at last PVI than did women (60.3% vs 46.4%). Compared to the TROJAN SIECCAN University Student Sexual Health Study conducted in 2013 – the proportion of men and women reporting condom use at last PVI has not changed significantly (<https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/canadian-university-students-say-they-take-sexual-health-seriously-but-condom-use-and-knowledge-low-trojan-study-finds-513131181.html>).

Most participants reported that the main reason that they used a condom was for birth control (45.5%); about one-third (38.1%) reported that the main reason was equally birth control and STI prevention. A minority of participants (16.4%) indicated that the main reason that they used a condom was for STI prevention. There were no gender differences in these responses.

The most common reason for not using a condom at last sex was “I or my partner uses another form of birth control” (reported by 37.9% of men and 50.4% of women). A minority of participants gave other reasons (i.e., I know my partner does not have an STI (17.2% of men, 14.8% of women), “I don’t like the feel of them” (9.2% of men 4.8% of women), “I am not concerned about unintended pregnancy” (6.9% of men, 3.7% of women).

Predictors of Condom Use Last PVI

For men, condom use at last PVI was associated with:

- Using an app to connect with their partner – 78% of men who used an app like Tinder or Grindr to connect with their most recent partner used a condom at last PVI, 55.3% of men who did not find their partner on Tinder or Grindr used a condom at last PVI.
- Relationship type – men who were single were more likely to use a condom than men who were in serious relationships (70.6% vs. 54.0%)
- Number of partners over the past year – 66.7% of men who had more than one partner over the past year used a condom for last PVI, compared to 50.4% of men who had one partner
- Alcohol use before last PVI – 78.6% of men who had 1 or more alcoholic drinks used a condom at last PVI, compared to 51% of men who reported no alcohol use.
 - Alcohol use before sex was more common among single and casually dating people than those in more serious relationships (where condom use is also less common). It is likely that drinking alcohol was more common in casual dating settings where condom use is also more common (rather than drinking alcohol leading to more condom use directly).
- Pornography use – men who used online pornography once per week or more were less likely to report using a condom at last PVI than men who used online pornography less than once a week (49.7% vs 75.0%).

For men, condom use at last PVI was NOT associated with

- Marijuana use in the two hours before most recent sexual activity
- Having an orgasm in the sexual encounter
- Emotional or sexual satisfaction in current relationship
- Experience of sexual problems – difficulty getting and maintaining an erection or early ejaculation were not more or less common depending on condom use (condom use was not associated with sexual functioning in this study)

For women, condom use at last PVI was associated with

- Using an app to connect with their partner – 61.4% of women who used an app like Tinder or Grindr to connect with their last partner used a condom at last PVI, 43.2% of women who did not find their partner on Tinder or Grindr used a condom at last PVI.
- Relationship type – women who were single were more likely to use a condom than women who were in serious relationships (69.8% vs. 36.1%).
- Number of partners over the past year – 52.3% of women who had more than one partner over the past year used a condom for last PVI, compared to 42.7% of women who had one partner.
- Alcohol use before sex – 58.5% of women who had 1 or more alcoholic drinks used a condom at last PVI, compared to 42.4% of women who reported no alcohol use before last PVI.
- Experience of sexual problems – vaginal pain, dryness, and difficulty with orgasm were not more or less common depending on condom use (condom use was not associated with sexual functioning in this study)

For women, condom use at last PVI was NOT associated with

- Marijuana use in the two hours before most recent sexual activity
- Having an orgasm in the sexual encounter
- Emotional or sexual satisfaction in current relationship
- Frequency of sexual communication
- Experience of sexual problems
- Pornography viewing once a week or more

Condom Use and Pleasure

There was no difference in pleasure reported for last PVI depending on whether condoms were used, for either gender.

About two-thirds (69%) of men reported that their last PVI was “very pleasurable”, regardless of whether condoms were used or not. Half (50.4%) of women reported that their last PVI was “very pleasurable”, regardless of whether condoms were used or not.