

3.1 Qualitative research on adult men

Research Brief 3a

Qualitative Study on Men, Sexuality and Crisis Pregnancy.

This study aims to explore the meanings and values which Irish men of different ages attach to sexual health and sexuality. The study will also explore the self-perceived role of men in crisis pregnancy, across the prevention, decision-making and outcome stages.

Background to this research:

Recent years have seen an increase in interest in the sexual health of young men, largely due to increased concern about STI's. Although sex and reproduction involve both men and women, women's health care needs in these areas have tended to receive far more attention than those of men (Sonnfield, 2002).

Increasing evidence suggests that failure to involve men could result in important and far-reaching social and health consequences, both for themselves and for their female partners. There has been very little research in Ireland which addresses the experiences, problems and sexual concerns of men.

Studies which examine levels of sexual knowledge tend to reveal that men's knowledge and awareness of contraception, fertility and STI's is poorer than that of women the same age (e.g. Bonner, 1996). Work by Smith (1996) revealed a strong demand for information on contraception and sexuality among both Irish men and women. A national survey will be carried out with Irish adults to assess the sexual knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of men and women. This study will provide invaluable baseline data regarding key aspects of men's sexual health. However, men's sexual health also needs to be explored from a deeper social psychological, relationship and contextual level. For example, a key construct of relevance to men's sexuality is that of masculinity.

It is important to examine sexuality within broader social and relationship contexts. Previous research, both nationally and internationally, indicates that relationships appear to make risk-taking more acceptable (e.g. Mahon et al., 1998; Hyde, 1996). In addition, Greene et al., (1989) found that they type of relationship (married versus not married) was related to the type of contraception couples used. Social contexts, such as the influence of peers, parents and the media are also of primary relevance to understanding male sexuality. A Northern Irish Department of Health Report (2000), for example, documented that males feel under pressure from peers and the media to have sex. Such social and relationship contexts need to be understood in order to gain a comprehensive

picture of the broader influences on Irish male sexuality. In addition, previous research has shown variations in sexual behaviour according to age, for example young adulthood is the age of greatest sexual risk, especially for acquiring STI's or HIV or for causing unintended pregnancies. Research has shown that men in their 20's are more likely to be sexually active and less likely to use condoms than teenagers (Ku, Sonenstein & Pleck, 1994). There is also evidence that risk-taking in men may decrease with age (North Eastern Health Board). This study will examine whether the meanings and values which men attach to sex change as they get older.

Yamey (1999) indicates that young men have been neglected in terms of efforts to improve reproductive health. Targeting research, sexual health initiatives and services primarily at women can encourage the perception that the prevention of unplanned pregnancies, STI's, use of contraceptives and other reproductive health concerns are the responsibility of women. Social contexts may also perpetuate the feeling among men that their involvement in areas such as reproductive health and crisis pregnancy is not essential or expected. A study in the South East of Ireland examined the experiences of teenage pregnancy. Although the researchers attempted to include expectant and current teenage fathers, only two men participated in the study. These men commented that they did not feel included in the pregnancy process by health care service providers. In addition, the men reported that their own family, neighbours and friends also focused attention solely on their partner (Dempsey, Heslin & Bradley, 2001). If it is assumed that reproductive health and family planning are women's issues, there is a risk that men will not be adequately supported in meeting their own sexual needs.(Ndong et al., 1999).Therefore, the value of involving men in matters relating to reproduction and sexual behaviour is two-fold; it will promote the identification of men's own distinct sexual health needs and concerns and also empower men to share responsibility and to play an active role in reproductive and sexual health, and also in crisis pregnancy. To date, there is very little research in Ireland which specifically examines the role of men in crisis pregnancy, and the present study aims to fill this knowledge gap. Finally, the study will also explore the dominant discourses which Irish men use in discussing issues relating to sexuality and crisis pregnancy.

Research aims:

To explore the meanings which Irish men attach to sex, and the influence of social/ relationship contexts in developing and perpetuating these meanings, and to explore the self-perceived role of Irish men in crisis pregnancy.

Research objectives:

1. To explore the meanings and values which Irish men of different ages attach to sex and sexuality. These meanings and values will be explored in relation to:
 - Social norms, gender roles and expectations, concepts of 'masculinity' and risk perception.

- Social contexts and the influences of peers, parents, the media, the community.
 - Relationship context; relationship status and relationship type (e.g. long term, casual).
2. To explore the self-perceived role of Irish men in crisis pregnancy. More specifically
 - To explore the role of men in prevention of crisis pregnancy (e.g. sexual risk-taking, perceived responsibility for contraception/ protective behaviours, influence of social contexts, norms and expectations on encouraging/ discouraging preventative behaviours).
 - To explore the role of men in crisis pregnancy decision-making (e.g. perceived level of involvement/ feelings of inclusion in decision-making process, extent to which men wish to be involved in decision-making, knowledge of available options and possible outcomes).
 - To explore the impact of crisis pregnancy on Irish men (e.g. the emotional impact of abortion or adoption, the impact of unplanned fatherhood, the perceived need for support services targeted at men involved in crisis pregnancy).
 3. To examine the discourses used by Irish men when discussing issues relating to sex and crisis pregnancy.

Research deliverables:

- An understanding of the meanings and values which Irish men attach to sex and sexuality, and how these meanings and values may vary across the lifespan.
- Knowledge of the ways in which the sexuality of Irish men is influenced by social and relationship contexts. Effective sexual health promotion/ education programmes for men may be informed by the consideration of such influences and the role they play in shaping men's sexual attitudes and beliefs.
- Greater understanding of the perceived and desired role of men at the preventative, decision-making and outcome stages of crisis pregnancy.
- Knowledge of the impact of crisis pregnancy on Irish men. This information can be used to identify the support and service needs of men involved in crisis pregnancy.
- Seeking men's perspectives and identifying their needs will help promote their feelings of inclusion and the sharing of responsibilities associated with reproductive health and crisis pregnancy.
- Identification of the language used by Irish men when discussing issues relating to sex and crisis pregnancy. This knowledge can be used to identify relevant language for use in the development of effective sexual health promotion messages for men.
- Provision of rich qualitative data which will compliment national quantitative survey data on sexual knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of Irish men.

Methodology and sampling considerations:

Due to the exploratory nature of this study a qualitative methodology would be appropriate. The perspectives of the men themselves are central to the present study. It is hoped that a qualitative research approach will allow for respondents' own experiences to be centralised in the data collection process. A qualitative approach will also help identify the dominant discourses used by men when discussing issues relating to sexuality and crisis pregnancy, and the values and range of meanings expressed by the language used.

Possible data collection methods include focus groups and/ or individual interviews. Social desirability factors are likely to play an important role in discussions relating to sex and sexuality, and individual approaches to data collection would be beneficial in terms of avoiding the potential influence of peers on participant responses.

As the study wishes to explore how issues relating to sexuality vary across different stages of the life-span, the sample should include heterosexual men from 18 years upwards (young men below 18 will be investigated in a separate study). It is perhaps ageist and unethical to impose an upper age limit on the study respondents (see Layte, Fullerton & McGee, 2003). The sample should also contain variation in relationship status of respondents (e.g. married, single, in long-term relationship, casual relationship). The study will also explore issues relating to crisis pregnancy, and therefore the sample should include men who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, a crisis pregnancy.

Budget guidance:

The budget allocated for this piece of research is in the region of €40,000 - €50,000, inclusive of VAT.

Timetable for reporting process:

The suggested timeframe for this study is 4 to 6 months.

Ethical considerations:

As mentioned previously ethical considerations and means of addressing and resolving these need to be elaborated in the tender bid.

Please refer to the *Invitation to Tender* letter for information relating to expected outputs, reporting arrangements, ethical consideration, terms of reference, contacts and details for submission and content of tender bids. This information is elaborated in section 2.2 of the *Invitation to Tender* letter.

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