

SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN AN INTERNATIONAL NIGHTLIFE RESORT

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I am going to talk today about sexual behaviour among young British holidaymakers visiting an international nightlife resort, based around research we have conducted in the Spanish island of Ibiza over the last few years.

I will start by saying a little about sexual health in the UK. Over the last few years we have seen dramatic increases in levels of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the UK. Between 1996 and 2002, diagnoses of gonorrhoea and chlamydia have almost doubled and diagnoses of syphilis have increased by over 900%. Alongside this we have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe. So you could say we are having a sexual health crisis at the moment and there is a lot of interest nationally in trying to promote safe sex and reduce STIs and unwanted pregnancies.

The kind of behaviour that contributes to declining sexual health is not constant throughout the year, but peaks around holiday periods. Hence Christmas and summer holiday seasons are followed by peaks in demand for emergency contraception, peaks in attendance at sexual health clinics and peaks in requests for terminations among young people. So holiday periods seem to be a particularly risky time for sexual health, and in addition to increasing levels of STIs we have also seen increasing levels of international travel. The number of holidays taken abroad by British people has more than doubled in the last two decades and in 2002, young people from the UK made over 17 million visits abroad.

The types of holidays that young people are taking nowadays are increasingly focused around the nightlife that is available in the destination they are going to. They are not necessarily choosing their holiday destination based around the weather or the beaches, but more around what kind of nightlife is available in the resort, which DJs are playing, and what sort of social activities are on offer. As with all holidays, these types of holiday offer young people a chance to escape from social responsibilities. They do not have to get up in the morning and go to work or college, they can stay out all night, they are away from the supervision of adults and authority figures, and they can generally go out and enjoy themselves without restraints. And our research, and that done by others, has shown elevated levels of alcohol and drug consumption among young people when they are on holiday. People drink more frequently and take drugs more frequently than they would do normally when they are at home.

Over the last few years in particular, the British media has really become interested in nightlife holidays and what our young people do when they are abroad. In newspapers we see articles on binge drinking and anti-social behaviour by young people abroad, while TV documentaries frequently follow the antics of young people during their holiday. However, they tend to pick on the most outrageous young people, because it makes the best TV - so we see these people going out and getting drunk every night, meeting different sexual partners every night, and it can give other young people the impression that this is what you are expected to do on holiday. This is a really dangerous message to be sending out. Our travel companies do not help and many adverts for youth holidays use sex to sell holiday packages. So this is the

image given to young people about holiday behaviour - that holidays are about drinking and having sex. But what we wanted to do was find out true levels of risky sexual behaviour when young people were abroad.

We based our research on Ibiza, a Spanish Island, which is the most popular foreign holiday destination among young people from the UK. The island itself has a population of about 80,000, but it receives around one and a half million tourists every year. Almost half of these are from the UK, with around a quarter of a million young British people travelling to Ibiza on holiday every year. The island has a long association with the dance scene, and it still now has some of the biggest clubs in the world. Just as an example, the club 'Privilege' has a capacity of 10,000 people and during the summer months it holds regular events by some of the UK's big club nights; and it is open until 9 o'clock in the morning, and this type of nightlife is what is attracting many people out to Ibiza.

The target population for our research was young British people who have visited Ibiza. We developed a short anonymous questionnaire, and we asked people about their levels of substance use and their sexual behaviour, both during their stay in Ibiza and their normal behaviour at home. I am just going to talk about their sexual behaviour today. We gave these questionnaires out in Ibiza Airport as people were waiting to fly home to the UK, at the end of their stay. The data I am presenting are from the years 2000, 2001 and 2002, and across this period we had a total sample of about 1,500 people.

Just over half the people we surveyed were male, and the age range was 16 to 35 with the majority in the 20 to 25 year age group. The mean length of stay was 10 days, showing that most people were just on a one or two week holiday. The main reason given for visiting Ibiza was music, so it was the dance scene that was attracting people. Just a third said they were attracted there for the weather and fifteen percent said they were going there specifically to look for sex, and this was higher amongst men than women. I am not going to go into detail about substance use but just as an overview, practically everyone we surveyed had drunk alcohol in Ibiza, just over sixty percent had smoked tobacco, and over fifty percent said they had used some type of illegal drug, with the most common drug being ecstasy.

What is important for us today is that three-quarters of respondents travelled to Ibiza without a current sexual partner. I am going to look at sexual behaviour among this group first. Of all those who arrived without a sexual partner just under half had sex during their holiday, and over a quarter had sexual with more than one person while they were there. In fact we found that those who had sex in Ibiza had on average the same number of sexual partners during their holiday as they had done during the previous six months, showing that sexual activity is increased whilst people are on holiday.

In order to identify risky sexual behaviour we asked participants, of those individuals they had sex with, with how many did they always use a condom? And this figure shows the number of unprotected sexual partners reported by those arriving without a sexual partner who had sex in Ibiza (refers to screen). Firstly, what this shows is that almost two thirds of people that have sex in Ibiza always use condoms, and this is really encouraging as it shows that the safe sex message is getting through to the

majority of people. However, it also shows that over a third of people are having unprotected sex with new people during their holiday and that almost twenty percent are having unprotected sex with more than one person. This is a really important group facing real risk, as they are exposing themselves to sexual transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies. And it is not only people from the UK, but some are also having sex with people from other countries and therefore increasing the risk of international transmission of STIs.

Looking at respondents who arrived with a sexual partner, as you would expect most of these had sex with just one person who would probably have been their current partner. Twenty per cent did not have sex, but six percent of people had sex with more than one person during their stay, so had sex with someone additional to their current partner. Looking at the number of unprotected sexual partners, unlike those who arrived without a partner the majority of those who arrived with a partner did not use condoms. When people are in a relationship they tend to see themselves as being not being at risk of sexually transmitted infections, so they might use other forms of contraception. However five percent of this group had unprotected sex with more than one partner during their holiday, so also with someone other than their partner, and we also found that nine percent of people who arrived with a partner had had sex with somebody else during the previous six months. This shows that even if people are in a relationship there is no guarantee that the relationship is exclusive, it could be transient and it is still important to get the safe sex message across.

Identifying risk factors for risky sexual behaviour, we found that having any sex abroad was associated with using illicit drugs and having had more sexual partners in the previous six months. Having unprotected sex and having sex with more than one partner was associated with smoking and again with having more sexual partners in the previous six months. So a key risk factor appears to be the number of sexual partners that people have, with those that have more sexual partners in general being more likely to practice unsafe sex and have more sexual partners when they are abroad. Again this shows that this is a really high-risk group. Those individuals that are most likely to practice risky sexual behaviour abroad and potentially contract sexually transmitted infections are also more likely to practice risky sexual behaviour at home and hence transmit these infections in their home country when they return.

Our research has shown that holidays are risk times for sexual health, so what is being done to protect young people's sexual health when they are on holiday? Our research is used by a partner organisation to put together an Ibiza Survival Guide booklet, which is disseminated in Ibiza. It presents the results of the research, showing that most people do use condoms when having sex and giving levels of drug use in Ibiza, and it provides sexual health and drug information and contact numbers for health and other services in Ibiza. Also, for the first time this year the Department of Health in England has sent sexual health campaign material such as posters to popular resorts including Ibiza for display in bars and clubs, and it has also been working with youth tourist companies to provide sexual health promotion material with holiday tickets. This is really encouraging, but we asked people whether they had seen any sexual health material while they were in Ibiza and only fourteen per cent of people said they had. So while more attention is now being paid to the sexual health of young people on holiday, much more needs to be done to get the safe sex message and sexual health material across to people when they really need it.

To summarise, despite what the media shows us most young people who are having sex on holiday are using condoms. They are looking after their sexual health, and it is really important to get this message across. Safe sex is normal behaviour, while what we see on TV and read in the newspapers is the actions of a minority. However it is a significant minority, meaning large numbers of young people are having unprotected sex with one or more new partners while they are on holiday. This is a high-risk group that is also more likely to have more sexual partners when they return home, and hence a key target population for sexual health promotion material.

With holidays being a risk period for young people's sexual health it is important that national sexual health policies do not just focus on people's behaviour when they are in their own country, but that they also make sure that the sexual health needs of their population are addressed when they are abroad. This means ensuring that sexual health promotion material is available in popular destinations, and that people can access condoms when they are on holiday. In order to do this, however, there needs to be joint working between health services and policy makers in both the country of origin and the destination country, and it is also very important to work with the travel companies and nightlife industries that are taking young people on holiday and providing them with entertainment, so that everyone is working together to protect the sexual health of young people when they are abroad.

Thank you.