



INTIMACY AND SEX

Scope

This Information Sheet covers calls fitting six problem types: relationships with partners, sexual activity, contraception and safe sex, sexual harassment, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections.

Sex and intimate relationships are prime issues for New Zealand's young people. Calls about partner relationships, pregnancy, sexual activity, sexually transmitted infections and contraception make up 17.5% of problem calls to What's Up.

Partner relationships are consistently the fourth most common reason children and young people contact the service, exceeded only by bullying and relationships with family and friends. What's Up counsellors respond to over 1,500 calls concerning partner relationships during 2002, accounting for just over 10% of problem calls.

Rating as the 5th and 8th most common problems, pregnancy (576 calls in 2002) and sexual activity (362 calls in 2002) together account for over 6% of all problem calls. Contraception, sexual harassment and sexually transmitted infections contribute another 1.3% calls each year (193 calls in 2002).

Sex and intimacy issues arise in late childhood and become progressively more important with age. Initially, children of about 7-8 years of age begin calling with concerns about their relationships with boyfriends or girlfriends. In later childhood calls about sexual activity, pregnancy, sexual harassment and contraception emerge and steadily grow in significance. Nearly 45% of all calls to What's Up by 18 year olds are about these topics.

Relationships with Partners

From 15 years of age onwards, concerns about relationships with partners take over from peer relationships as the most common reason for calling What's Up. This category includes problems between callers and their partners or intimate friends as well as sexual issues in significant or established relationships.

The most common type of calls about intimate relationships (36%) involve concerns about negotiating a relationship:

"Caller is not sure what the relationship is between her and her boyfriend—thinks she just wants to be friends with him now."

These are most likely to come from callers aged 13 to 16.

Calls about relationship breakdowns are the next most frequent (26%):

"Caller's boyfriend will not speak to her after they had an argument. Their friends are telling her that he has 'finished' with her but she wants him back."

These are predominantly from 13 to 18 year olds.

Callers wanting to establish a relationship are also common (20%):

"Caller wants to establish a relationship with a particular girl but is unsure how to ask her out."

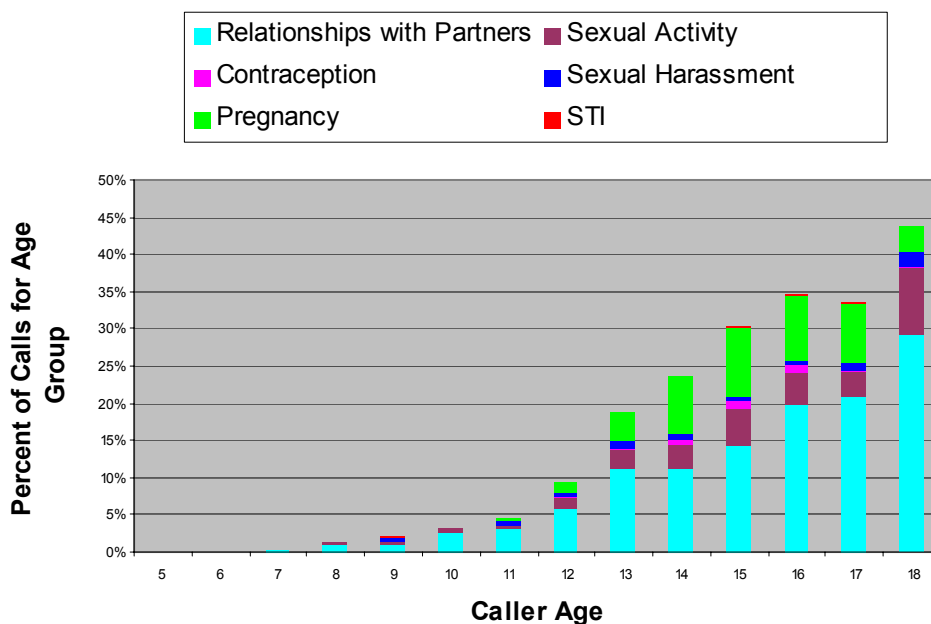
These come mostly from callers aged 13 to 16.

About 7% of calls are from people uncomfortable about sexual aspects of their relationship, unsure whether to begin sex or feeling pressured to have sex:

"Caller's boyfriend is pressuring her to have sex and she is starting to get annoyed about this."

Callers concerned about pressure to have sex are

Sex & Intimacy Issues With Age



Percent of Calls for Age Group

Caller Age

mostly aged between 13 and 16.

Pregnancy

What's Up responded to 637 calls about pregnancy in 2002.

Approximately equal proportions of these calls were seeking information about whether the caller might be pregnant (34%) or were about the caller's distress at telling significant others about the pregnancy (32%).

"Caller thinks she might be pregnant following a sexual assault. Is scared to ask her parents for help in case they blame it on her"

Another large group of callers (18%) are unsure about their pregnancy options:

"Caller's mother is angry that she is pregnant and caller is unsure whether she wants to keep the baby or have an abortion."

A similar number of calls (14%) are received from people concerned about a friend's or partner's pregnancy:

"Caller says his girlfriend is pregnant and he is worried that she will not stop drinking, which might hurt the baby."

A small number of callers (1%) need urgent medical or emotional support with pregnancy:

"Caller is two months pregnant and is bleeding and has a sore stomach."

The great majority (85%) of calls about pregnancy are from callers aged 13 to 16.

Sexual Activity

Calls about sexual activity cover a range of issues including sexual thoughts and feelings as well as sexual behaviour. Calls about rape and sexual abuse are excluded from this category. What's Up received 384 calls in this category during 2002.

Most calls (74%) about sexual activity are made by callers aged 13 to 16. Most commonly, they are calling with concerns about some specific sexual activity (36% of calls). Also common (32%) are calls from people who are unsure about beginning sexual activity:

"Caller says her boyfriend gave her condoms for her birthday and she isn't sure whether she wants to have sex with him."

About 18% of calls about sexual activity are seeking information about sex:

"Caller has had some non-penetrative sexual contact with her boyfriend and wonders whether this means she has lost her virginity."

A further 12% are wanting to discuss a particular sexual experience:

"Caller said she had got drunk at a party and left with a boy. She woke up the next day in a car and the boy has told her friends that they had sex. She is worried that she could be preg-

nant or have an STI."

A small number of calls (2%) report that sex is difficult, uncomfortable or unsatisfying.

Sexual Harassment

What's Up received 108 calls about sexual harassment during 2003. These calls involve unwanted attention of a sexual nature from anyone, including verbal harassment, stalking, voyeurism and unwanted touching.

Repeated occurrences of harassment were reported in 38% of the calls in this category:

"Caller says that a boy in her class is constantly touching her and the other girls in ways that make them feel uncomfortable. She and her parents have spoken to her teacher about it but nothing has changed."

Occasional or isolated incidents make up 51% of sexual harassment calls.

About 5% of sexual harassment calls involve severe distress:

"Caller reports that a boy at school has been stalking her and trying to throw pens up her skirt and touch her bottom. She recently overheard him say to a friend, 'Let's rape [caller's name]'. She is feeling very scared."

Counselling and Outcomes of Calls

What's Up plays an important role for young people wanting to explore problems of an intimate or sexual nature. The anonymity and confidentiality of the service provides a safe environment for young people to freely and openly discuss their concerns.

Counsellors support and encourage callers to fully explore issues, which enables them to make informed decisions about their situation. Frequently, Counsellors work with the caller to develop and practice clear communication and assertiveness skills that may be used to improve the situation.

What's Up is also able to provide young people with information about other agencies in the community that can provide additional support with these issues. Although approximately 4% of all calls to What's Up result in referral of the caller to another organisation for additional help, the rates are much higher for calls concerning sex (16%), pregnancy (20%) and sexual activity (14%).

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