

**WHAT DO  
YOU NEED  
TO**  
**#MAKEITGOOD?**

# **Insight Topic 12:**

# **ONE NIGHT**

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# **STANDS**

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Report authors:  
Dr Colin Morrison/Ross Robertson  
June 2016



## INTRODUCTION

NHS Tayside and partners want to adopt a positive approach to young people's sexual health. An insight gathering project has engaged young people in discussion of what they need to make relationships good. The purpose of the insight process is to bring detail to consideration of future services, particularly the possible use of social marketing or broader communication messages targeting young people.

This paper is one of a number of topic chapters published at [www.makeitgoodtayside.org](http://www.makeitgoodtayside.org) Each topic chapter presents:

- Insight from young people.
- Insight from other research, resources or services.
- A summary and discussion points.

For more about the insight gathering process please refer to '**About the Insight Gathering project**' also published at [www.makeitgoodtayside.org](http://www.makeitgoodtayside.org)

## 1. INSIGHT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

In the initial focus groups, the topic of **ONE-NIGHT STANDS** was raised and discussed by 6 of the 16 groups. In terms of online engagement, responses to the **ONE-NIGHT STANDS** online survey came from 57 young people as follows:

Online engagement by Local Authority:

	Number of online submissions
Angus	10
Dundee	40
Perth and Kinross	3
Other area	4
Total by method	57

Online engagement by gender:

	Male	Female	Other gender identity
Number of participants	26	31	-

Online engagement by age:

	Under 16	16	17	18	19	20	21+
Number of participants	9	27	9	4	3	1	4

In addition to discussion in focus groups, young people completing the online survey provided a response to the request: *Tell us about your experience of one-night stands when it comes to sex or relationships*. Young people's insight extends the theme of *one-night stands* to the associated idea of *casual sex*. Insight from young people points to several themes.

### **Understanding 'one-night stands' and what they mean to young people**

For some young people a one-night stand is about having sex with someone otherwise unknown to them, and this being the only contact, while for others it is about having one-off sexual contact which wouldn't normally be what was expected, whether with someone known or not.

Having sex with someone you don't know. (16/Dundee/Female)

When you have sex with someone that you wouldn't normally have. (16/Angus/Female)

One night stands is when you go out clubbing or go to a party - in this case a BBQ - and the people get very intoxicated and then go in a tent and do stuff then never speak again. Therefore, that is a one-night stand. (16/Dundee/Female)

Having sexual contact with someone and then not having anything to do with them again. (>16/Dundee/Female)

Young people also recognise that what lies behind the one-night stand might be a need for intimacy or hope that something more might come of it.

One night stands can be good to feel wanted by someone for a short duration of time. (20/PK/Male)

Some people expect a relationship to come out of it. Others just want a one-night stand. (Focus group 3/Dundee)

A young person might also see a one-night stand positively, and plan to have fun and minimise risk.

It can be fun but you shouldn't be careless. Only have one-night stands with someone you know, who you know will care about you and doesn't have any STD's and use a condom to prevent pregnancy. (16/Dundee/Female)

A theme across contributions from young men is seeing one-night stands as something they desire or aspire to.

As long as both people are up for it. it's all good. (16/Dundee/Male)

Never had one but would love to experience one. (19/Dundee/Male)

A night involving sex with no strings attached. (16/Dundee/Male)

lad bible worthy. (16/Dundee/Male)

Not experienced one yet, hopefully will. (18/PK/Male)

### **Alcohol**

From young people's contributions alcohol is central in the experience of one-night stands. The insight chapter on ALCOHOL also discusses the role that alcohol plays in lowering inhibitions and affecting choices. Responding to the prompt statement *tell us about your experience of one-night stands when it comes to sex or relationships* young people responded as follows:

When someone has sex with a random woman or female for the night under the influence of alcohol. (16/Angus/Female)

Highly immoral and usually drunken, result in unwanted pregnancies and unwanted emotion, should be discouraged by any means possible.  
(17/Dundee/Male)

Normally fueled by alcohol, a rare occasion where perhaps two people have no real connection other than a sexual desire for each other. More often than not people who participate in such activities deem it a mistake afterwards.  
(17/Dundee/Male)

I have only had one one-night stand. I have slept with 8 boys, but had sex over 200 times. My one-night stand was with someone I had known for about 3 years, we were close friends, we were both really drunk and he kept asking me to have sex with him so I did. I asked him to stop half way through and he did. (>16/Dundee/Female)

### **Regret**

Young people's insight identifies the mix of alcohol and (subsequently) regret. For young people regret is experienced as feelings of hurt and shame and consequently impacts on self-worth; again talking about *one-night stands* young people responded:

Good at the time but not in the morning. (16/Dundee/Male)

Hurtful disappointing and crap. (16/Dundee/Female)

Hurtful, disappointing and makes you feel like shit. (>16/Dundee/Female)

Walk of shame. (17/Dundee/Male)

Regretfully, between 16 and 19 I had many, many one night stands.  
(21+/Angus/Female)

Drunkenness, not safe, regret. (16/Dundee/Female)

Emotionless, hurtful, makes you feel worthless after it is over.  
(16/Dundee/Female)

Drunken mistake at a party, with the totally wrong person and I'm now left embarrassed. (>16/Angus/Female)

### **The pressure to have 'casual sex'**

Discussion in focus groups and from individual online contributions also points to young people challenging pressure to have sex as a one-off thing.

You need to know that they will be there for you. It's not like with a one-night stand or something casual, you have to work on a relationship, it takes time.  
(Focus group 5/PK)

Just like the same as truth and respect, I wouldn't want to be with someone that is just after a shag, 'cos I know they are probably just going to be like that with other people too. So they are just like either really weak, or using you. (Focus group 6/Dundee)

For this young person there is a need to resist the normalisation of behaviour that sees partying, alcohol and sex as the norm. Responding to the online *one-night stands* survey one young woman writes:

I looked at the activities provided at fresher's week when my sister went to university and many of them encouraged the youngsters to take part in that kind of behaviour. I don't care what experience they all have, it's not okay to encourage that kind of behaviour amongst young people. (16/PK/Female)

### **Reputation**

Earlier some comments from young men framed one-night stands as something to aspire to. Young women's insight identifies a different perspective, with consequences in terms of reputation for young women.

I worry that guys just want casual sex, or at least sex without any of the commitment. I know it's probably just a media stereotype, but it's still something I think about. It makes me not trust them. (Focus group 2/Angus)

YP 1: Boys get a pat on the back, girls get pure slated.

YP 2: No matter what you do, if you get a reputation it is never going to leave you. (Focus group 9/Dundee)

If they have loads of sex, with everyone, boys are a legend and girls are a slag. (Focus group 11/Dundee)

### **Good sex versus casual sex**

This final contribution identifies that while one-night stands or casual sex might be about having a good time, this might not necessarily be the outcome when people don't know each other. The topic of PLEASURE is discussed further in the insight chapter of that name.

I think if people aren't in a relationship and they are just having sex then they are just out for a good time. I mean I think that is why people have sex outside of a relationship. But how they can make it good, I don't know, because they don't know each other – don't know how their bodies work. It's not like they talk about it beforehand. (Focus group 9/Dundee)

## 2. INSIGHT FROM RESEARCH, RESOURCES OR SERVICES

The purpose of identifying insight from other sources is to help locate young people's perceptions and lived experience in a broader context, and where possible to provide further evidence to support the stress which young people have given to an issue, in this section regarding one-night stands.

The most recent analysis of the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL 3) in Scotland<sup>i</sup> gives **insight on societal attitudes to one-night stands** and highlights gender differences. When asked if one-night stands are right or wrong, in terms of 16 to 29 year olds:

- *For men:* 34% say they are always or mostly wrong; 23% sometimes wrong; 15% rarely wrong and 24% not wrong at all.
- *For women:* 44% say they are always or mostly wrong; 34% sometimes wrong; 9% rarely wrong and 10% not wrong at all.

In their qualitative work with young adults, looking at stories about sexual and romantic relationships, Banker<sup>ii</sup> and colleagues have developed **a hierarchy of relationships**. In first place - the most sought after relationships - young people wanted a relationship with both sexual and romantic elements; secondly young people rated romantic relationships; thirdly relationships which are yet to be clarified as romantic or sexual; and finally (with the lowest rating) young people talked about relationships which were only sexual, 'just sex', 'hook-ups', 'casual sex' or 'one-night stands'. The researchers recognise that there is **a cultural pressure on young people to have sex out with relationships**, but that despite this both "males and females report wanting more than just a sexual relationship". For young women in particular this is seen as problematic, as with some of the insight offered by young people earlier, the authors recognise that "girls are bombarded with confusing and contradictory dominant cultural messages about how they should manage their developing sexuality. One of these messages is not to be a prude but also not to be a slut."

Work by Anne Campbell<sup>iii</sup> also suggests that **women are significantly more negative when it comes to feelings about one-night stands** in terms of regret or feelings of 'being used'. Using findings from the US National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Sara Sandberg-Thoma<sup>iv</sup> and colleagues report that there is evidence that poor mental health can underpin decisions to have casual sex, and that casual sex then leads to further decline in mental wellbeing; researchers state this is true for both young women and young men.

In terms of condom use another insight chapter on the topic of CONDOMS identifies that a lack of communication, and sex that is unplanned or rushed, are all barriers to condom use. It might be expected that such characteristics are reflected in sex that is casual or a one-off.

### **3. ONE-NIGHT STANDS: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION POINTS**

When it comes to the insight offered by young people and other sources important themes and issues have been highlighted. These are summarised below and discussion points are highlighted. Again, some attention is given to the use of insight from this project in terms of the use of social marketing to promote positive sexual health for young people.

#### **One-night stands and gender**

There is clearly some difference in how young men and young women talk about and experience one-night stands/casual sex. Of course it is important not to stereotype either set of responses, there will be differences and nuanced views dependent on personal experience and desires. In terms of social marketing however, if the topic is to be considered as appropriate for an intervention, then there is clearly a need for *segmentation*, that is tailored interventions that might be quite different for young men and young women. When it comes to young men there is clearly some issue, viewed in social marketing terms as *competition*, in terms of young men's views that casual sex is something to be desired or aspired to.

#### **Are one-nights stands ok?**

Young people's insight, or at least most insight from young women, associates casual sex with alcohol and regret. National data suggests that most people think that they are wrong to some extent. It might also be that one-night stands are not in reality the most pleasurable of experiences. In terms of social marketing the benchmark criteria emphasise that the approach should not be used simply to address attitudes or beliefs but to have a concern for changing behaviour. When it comes to casual sex/one-night stands this might be difficult to do, but other educational or social marketing interventions that work to promote positive behaviours – effective condom use, pleasure, happiness – might help young people to view casual sex as something which ultimately has more cost than benefit.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (NATSAL 3): Key Findings from Scotland Elizabeth Fuller at al <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/997277/NatSal-Scotland.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> 'Dating is Hard Work: A Narrative Approach to Understanding Sexual and Romantic Relationships in Young Adulthood' Jamie E. Banker at al in Contemporary Family Therapy (2010) 32:173–191  
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<sup>iii</sup> 'The Morning after the Night Before: Affective Reactions to One-Night Stands among Mated and Unmated Women and Men' Anne Campbell in Human Nature June 2008 Volume 19 Issue 2 pp157-173

<sup>iv</sup> 'How Poor Mental Health and Casual Sex Reinforce Each Other' Research and Innovation Communications The Ohio State University  
<http://researchnews.osu.edu/archive/casualsex.htm>