Sexual Health in The Netherlands 2017: Summary

Sexual Health in the Netherlands 2017 is a large-scale representative study of the sexual health of adults aged 18 to 80 years in the Netherlands. Rutgers has conducted this periodical study three times before. In 2017, this study was part of the Lifestyle Monitor for the first time (Sexual Health in the Netherlands/Lifestyle Monitor: Rutgers in partnership with the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), 2017). It was also the first time that this study among adults was carried out together with the study Sex under the age of 25 (among young people) (Sex under the age of 25/Lifestyle Monitor, Rutgers/STI Aids The Netherlands in partnership with the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), 2017).

In the study Sex under the age of 25, 15 of the 25 regional public health services in the Netherlands used the opportunity to gain insight into the sexual health of young people in their own region by increasing the sample for their region. Because the young people aged 18 and older in this study also took part in Sexual Health in the Netherlands, this had an impact on the number of adults who participated. Over 17,000 people aged 18 to 80 years completed a questionnaire about a wide range of sexuality-related topics. A weighting procedure was used to compile a sample that was representative of the Dutch population. The results show the current state of sexual health in the Netherlands.

**Positive experience of sexuality**

Most Dutch people are happy with their partner, satisfied with their appearance and satisfied with the quality of their sex lives. If they are not satisfied, it is because of how often they have sex: a quarter of men and one in five women are (very) dissatisfied with their frequency of sex. Men experience more positive emotions with regard to sex than women. For example, 92% of men and 75% of women say they enjoy sex very much. Among young people aged up to 25 years, the differences between men and women in their experience of sexuality are smaller. There are also aspects of experience where the differences between men and women are strikingly small. For instance, women as well as men have sex both out of love and out of lust.

**Attitudes generally progressive**

Attitudes towards sexuality are predominantly progressive in the Netherlands: a small minority think sex before marriage or masturbation are wrong. Dutch people also have a positive attitude towards sexuality education in schools. Nine out of ten people think that it should be compulsory. For a number of themes,
however, attitudes are more ambiguous. For example, in principle almost no one thinks that sexual assault is usually provoked by the victim, but different standards are applied to online sexual harassment. One in three men and one in four women think that a nude picture online is one’s own fault. And although a majority of men (71%) and women (80%) think homosexuality is normal, 25% of homosexual and bisexual men and 15% of lesbian and bisexual women have been verbally abused in the past year.

**Sexual behaviour with a partner**
Almost everyone has sex with a partner at some point in their life. About one in twenty people aged over 25 have not had that experience. Three quarters of adult Dutch people have had sex with a partner in the past half year. For 86% of men and 90% of women in this group this was a steady partner. Dutch people have a varied and equal repertoire of sexual behaviour. For example, giving and receiving manual and oral sex are both equally common. Five out of six people aged over 25 do not have sex more often than three times a month. Thus, most couples do not achieve the often-mentioned average of “twice a week”.

**Solo sex**
Most men and women have masturbated in the past 6 months, but this group is considerably larger among men (84%) than among women (67%). Men also masturbate more often than women: 40% of men do it every week, compared to 14% of women. Men watch porn more often than women. 71% of men have watched porn in the past 6 months, for women this is 29%. For most people, watching porn does not replace or hinder sex with a partner. In fact, people who watch porn more often also have sex with a partner more often.

**Elderly people less sexually active**
Sexual activity (both solo and with a partner) decreases with age. Of the people aged 25 to 39 years, 85% have had sex with a partner in the past half year. Among people aged over 70, this is 51%. Apart from age, this mainly depends on whether one has a partner or not. Of the people aged over 70 who have a partner, 62% have had sex in the past half year.

**Singles active in sexting and dating**
Sexting (making and sending personal nude pictures or sex videos) and meeting up and having sex via dating apps are most common among 18- to 24-year-olds and among people without a steady relationship. If we only take people without a steady relationship into account, however, it turns out that people aged 25 to 39 years engage in sexting and online dating at least as often. For instance, among
the group of singles, 22% of men and 15% of women have had sex with someone they had met through a dating app in the past half year. That is more than among singles aged under 25 years. People without a partner also have more different sex partners (across their lifetime and recently) than people with a partner.

**Homosexual, lesbian and bisexual people**
Around 4% of men and women feel equally, predominantly or exclusively attracted to members of the same sex. In many respects, these people do not differ from heterosexual people. For example, we find no differences in frequency of sex, positive sexual emotions, sexual self-confidence, ease of talking about sex, sexual problems and body image. However, there are differences too. For instance, homosexual, bisexual and lesbian people engage more in online dating than heterosexual people. In addition, homosexual and bisexual men have more experience of sexting, sexual coercion and paid sex than heterosexual men.

**High use of contraception**
The use of contraception in the Netherlands is high. The contraceptive pill has been the most used contraceptive method in the Netherlands for years (30%). It is used especially by young women: 63% of sexually active women aged 18 to 24 take the pill. Among older women, the popularity of IUDs has increased: 18% of women aged 40 to 49 years use an IUD.

**Still unplanned pregnancies**
Despite the high use of contraceptives, 8% of women aged 18 to 49 years are at risk of an unplanned pregnancy, because they have sexual intercourse, do not use contraception, are fertile, and are not pregnant or do not want to become pregnant. Three per cent of women and men have experienced an unplanned pregnancy in the past year. Part of these pregnancies are unwanted (for 1.7% of women and 0.4% of men). Notably, two out of five people who experienced an unwanted pregnancy indicate that contraception had been used. The majority of these people indicate that the contraceptive method had not always been used or that something went wrong when using it. This means that women who use contraception can also be at risk of unplanned pregnancy.

**(Protection against) STIs and/or HIV**
Condoms are often not used with one’s most recent sex partner, even when this is a one-night-stand or casual partner. Among the group of people whose most recent sex partner was a one-night-stand, 42% of men and 55% of women did not
Condomen worden minder vaak gebruikt bij het oud worden en zijn lager onder mensen met een stabiele partner. In langdurige relaties kiezen rond de een der drie mensen voor het gebruik van een condoom aan het begin en stoppen er na een korte of lange periode van tijd mee. In dit groep, acht van tien mensen noemen een relatie met beide zijden niet voor aangezien ze deke voor STIs wanneer ze deze beslissing nemen. Een der drie vrouwen en een kwart van de mannen hebben ooit een STI onderzocht in hun levensgeschiedenis. De helft van deze groep werd gecontroleerd door een huisarts. De andere helft bezoekte een STI clinic of het hospitaal.

**Sexual violence and coercion**

Twintig-per cent van vrouwen en 6% van mannen hebben meehand, orale, vaginale of anale seks tegen hun wil en/of zijn gedwongen om seksuele dingen die ze niet wilden. Als kus en aanraking in een seksueel op z'n will en/of zijn gedwongen om seksuele dingen die ze niet wilden. Als kus en aanraking in een seksueel op z'n will and/or have been forced to do sexual things they did not want. If kissing and touching in a sexual way against one's will are included, the percentage is much higher still, namely 53% of women and 19% of men. Vijf per cent van vrouwen en 2% van mannen hebben seksueel geweld alvorens de leeftijd van 12. Elf per cent van vrouwen hebben ooit seks tegen hun wil, vergeleken met 1% van mannen.

**Consequences of sexual violence**

Ervaring van seksueel geweld heeft ernstige gevolgen voor een aanzienlijk aantal slachtoffers. Bijna de helft van mannen en meer dan de helft van vrouwen rapporteren dat ze klachten of problemen ervaren als gevolg van ervaring van seksueel geweld. Dit betreft vooral mentale, seksuele en relatieproblemen. Personen die hebben ervaren seksueel geweld hebben ook slechtere geestelijke gezondheid. Gegeven de mate van het probleem en de gevolgen die het heeft voor slachtoffers, de voorkoming van seksueel geweld en seksuele dwang is van cruciaal belang.

**Sexual problems**

Elf per cent van mannen en 15% van vrouwen hebben minstens één seksueel probleem dat vaak of altijd voorkomt en dat veel of zeer veel lijdt. Bij mannen, erectieproblemen (6%) en premature ejaculatie (3%) zijn het meest algemeen. Bij vrouwen, problemen maakt voornamelijk betrekking op subjetieve seksuele begeerte (7%), vaginale droogte (6%), pijn (5%) en orgasme (4%). Bij mannen, seksuele problemen zijn het meest algemeen onder die gemiddeld 70 jaar, terwijl seksuele problemen bij vrouwen het meest algemeen onder de leeftijd van 25 jaar. Voor beide groepen is dit 21%.

**Sex and health**

Fysiek gezondheid is een belangrijke voorspeller van seksueel gedrag en seksuele problemen. Hoe vaak mensen seks hebben voorspelt het meest sterk met hoe gezond
they are. The chance of a sexual problem is around twice as high if someone has a chronic illness or condition and/or takes medication for it.

**Insight into changes in four years’ time**

Because of the integration of Sexual Health in the Netherlands into the Lifestyle Monitor, we were able to use a random sample drawn by Statistics Netherlands (CBS) from the person population registers (BRP) for the first time in 2017. For the studies of 2006, 2009 and 2012 we used an online panel. A sample from the municipal population registers entails a huge improvement in the quality of the study. However, the change in recruitment method also means it is impossible to compare the results with earlier measurements. In the next edition of Sexual Health in the Netherlands, in four years’ time, we will be able to discuss changes over time.