

» Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration

In Focus: The Desire to Have Children

The Federal Centre for Health Education's (BZgA) representative study Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration is a representative repeat survey. A large-scale survey of young people, their parents and young adults was launched for the ninth time in the summer of 2019. It follows on from predecessor studies conducted between 1980 and 2014. The goal of the study is to acquire reliable data about the attitudes and behaviours of young people in the Federal Republic of Germany with regards to sexuality and contraception.

Having children of their own is still quite a distant idea for the vast majority of the 14- to 25-year-olds surveyed; nevertheless, they tend to feel positive about it, or at least the prospect of it.

This fact sheet will present an overview of the respondents' desire to have children based on the data from the most recent Youth Sexuality survey.

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Result 1

The desire to have children depends on many factors.

Whether or not the 14- to 25-year-old respondents said they wanted children when they were surveyed depended on various socio-demographic factors.

For instance, their socio-cultural background plays a role regarding the question of when the respondents are open to having their own children. It also influences how widespread the desire for children is. But one thing always remains the same, regardless of socio-cultural background: in every group only a minority reject the idea of having their own children (see Table 1).

Table 1

The desire to have children (broken down by various socio-demographic factors)

	Want children*	Don't want children	Undecided
Total	69	12	19
<i>Migrant background</i>			
No	68	12	19
Yes	73	10	17
<i>Religious ties</i>			
Close	77	10	13
Casual	73	9	17
Hostile/indifferent	64	14	21
<i>(Desired) qualifications</i>			
Basic (Hauptschule or similar)	67	15	18
Moderate (mittlere Reife or similar)	67	12	21
High (Abitur or similar)	71	11	17

*includes (expectant) parents
 Basis: 14- to 25-year-olds | figures in percent
 Source: BZgA, data set Youth Sexuality, 2019 survey

The respondents' own background is only a secondary factor when looking at their desire to have children and this is especially true for those under the age of 18 (a difference of 3 percentage points). Noteworthy differences only occur from age 18 onwards: adults with a migrant background are somewhat more likely to say that children are part of their life plan (79 %) than those without a migrant background (73 %).

The influence of the respondents' religious background is more significant (see Table 1).

- Generally speaking, young people who have religious ties are more likely to feel positively about having children one day than those who are not religious. There are differences here of up to 13 percentage points.
- Looking at the different religious denominations, the desire for children is most frequently expressed among Muslim adolescents and young adults (76 %). The equivalent figure is 70 percent among Catholics and 67 percent and 68 percent among Protestants and those without a religion respectively.

Young people with a higher level of education act on their desire for children, if present, at an older age: respondents up to the age of 25 with basic (desired) educational qualifications are more likely to already have children (9 %) than those with moderate or high educational qualifications (maximally 3 %). Overall however, openness towards (later) parenthood is similar among the different educational groups.

Children are an integral part of the life plans of 14- to 25-year-olds.

Result 2

The vast majority of young people between the ages of 14 and 25 in Germany want to have children one day (69%) – among them is a small percentage of adolescents and young adults who are already raising children or who are expecting a child at the time of the interview (3% and 1% respectively) (see Figure 1).

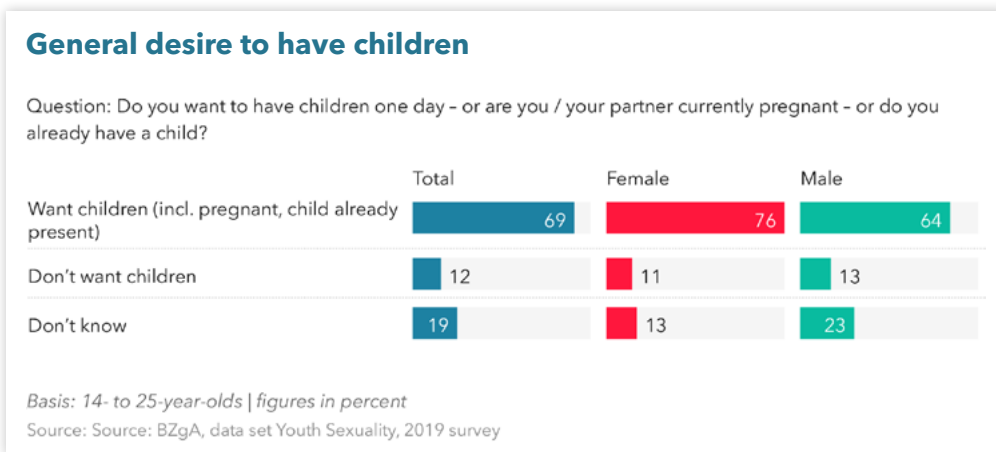


Figure 1

For girls and young women children generally seem to play a more significant role than they do for boys and young men:

- Three in four (76%) of female adolescents want to have children one day or are already (expectant) parents.
- Among their male peers only around two in three of the respondents (64%) said yes to the question about whether they wanted their own children one day.

Compared to the previous survey, from 2014, the percentage of young people who want children, already have a child or are expecting a child has slightly decreased (76 % at the time). This decrease is also there, albeit more weakly, among the girls and young women (a decrease of 4 percentage points); however, it affects the boys and young men much more, as the decrease here is 9 percentage points.

The reason for this decrease is not due to an increase in attitudes that are firmly against children. Rather, there has been an increase in uncertainty regarding the desire for children: boys and young men in particular are more likely to say 'don't know' (23 %; 2014 comparison: 18 %) to this question of biographical planning.

Only a minority in the age range surveyed explicitly speaks out against having their own children (currently 12 %) and this was already the case in previous surveys. There are no noteworthy differences here between the sexes (difference: 2 percentage points).

If it is a yes to children, then two is the preferred number.

During this 9th Youth Sexuality survey, only the young adults (those between 18 and 25) were asked about how many children they would ideally desire. The expectation was that the desire for children was still of low relevance for the respondents under the age of 18. However, even among those between 18 and 25 one in five still does not have clear views on this (20%).

As far as views have been given, the following stands out:

- Having just one child is not the ideal outcome for young adults. A mere 8 percent want just one child.
- Around half, on the other hand, say having two children would be ideal (49%).
- A further 19 percent are toying with the idea of raising three children.
- Only 6 percent would like to have four or more children.

Result 4

The desire for children takes time - especially for boys and young men.

Girls develop a clear attitude to the topic of having children of their own at a much younger age than their male counterparts:

- Among the 14- to 15-year-olds almost one in four are still undecided on the matter. However, already among the 16- to 17-year-old girls the number of those who are undecided drops markedly to 17 percent. And this figure drops further as they get older.
- Among the male respondents almost one in two are still undecided at age 14. It is only in adulthood, between the ages of 21 and 25, that this percentage falls to 17 percent.

Many boys and young men therefore start confronting the idea of having children of their own one day comparatively late. The boys under the age of 18 in particular frequently seem overwhelmed by the question: among the 14 and 15-year-olds almost half have not yet developed a clear attitude on the issue.

Those who then make a decision when they are older tend to make it in favour of a life with children (see Figure 2):

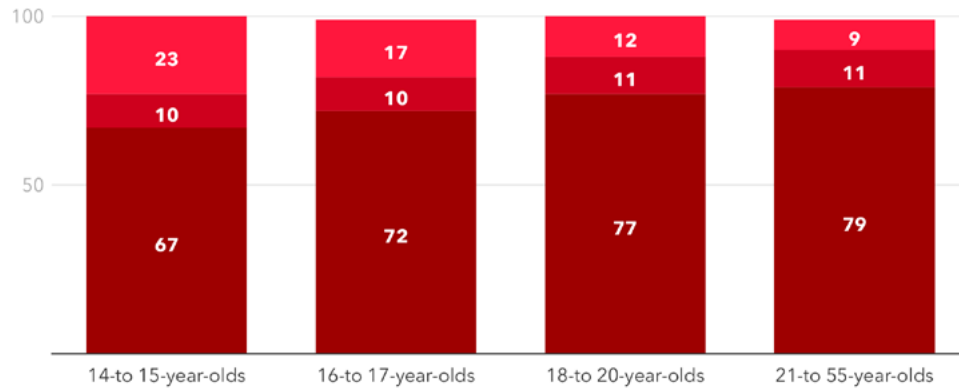
- This is unequivocal among those of the female sex: the percentage of those who firmly reject wanting children of their own is consistently around 10 percent among girls and young women across all age groups.
- Among the boys and young men the percentage rejecting the idea of having children of their own starts at a comparatively high level, but then decreases with increasing age. Once the male respondents reach the 21- to 25-year-old age bracket, the difference between the sexes disappears.

Figure 2

General desire to have children (sex and age comparison)

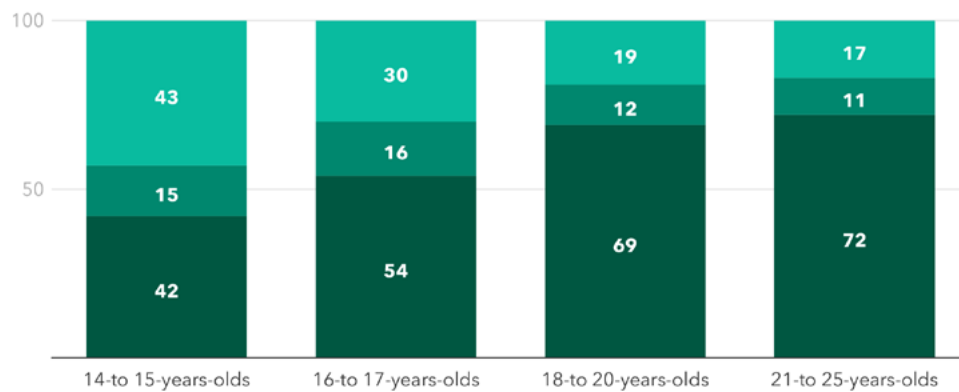
Question: Do you want to have children one day - or are you / your partner currently pregnant - or do you already have a child?

■ Want children* ■ Don't want children ■ Don't know



*includes expectant parents
 Basis: 14- to 25-year-old girls and young women | figures in percent
 Source: : BZgA, data set Youth Sexuality, 2019 survey

■ Want children* ■ Don't want children ■ Don't know



*includes expectant parents
 Basis: 14- to 25-year-old boys and young men | figures in percent
 Source: BZgA, data set Youth Sexuality, 2019 survey

Result 5

Unintended pregnancy: the younger the respondents, the more negative their attitude.

Having children is a firm part of the life plan for the majority of the adolescents and young adults surveyed. This attitude only develops, however, during the adolescent years, especially among the male respondents: the right time is crucial. It tends to be later in life rather than during young adulthood. The majority of respondents do not want children as adolescents. For half of the as yet childless 14- to 25-year-olds an unexpected pregnancy now would be a 'disaster' (50%). A further third would class such a situation as 'very unpleasant' (34%).

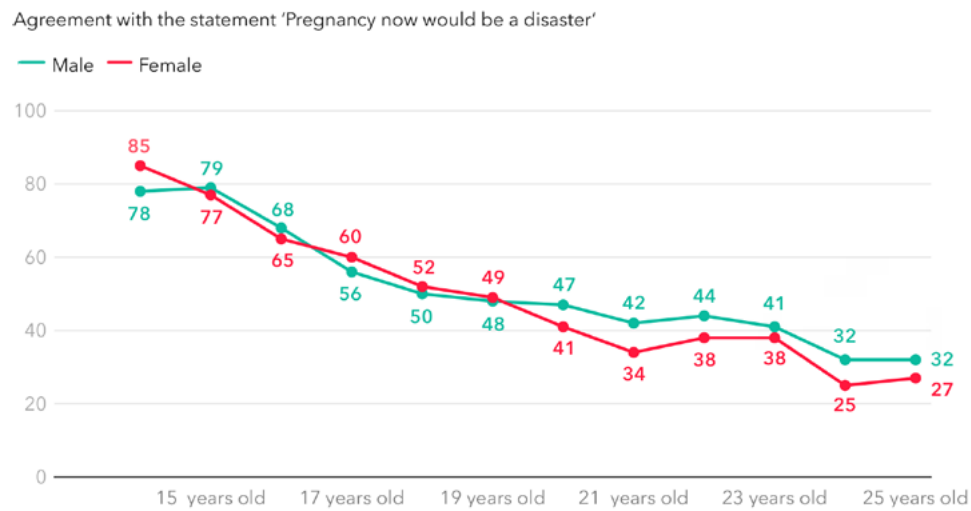
This is true for both the male and female adolescent respondents: for 85 percent of the girls and young women as well as for 83 percent of the boys and young men a sudden pregnancy now would be anything but a joyful event ('disaster' or 'very unpleasant').

Depending on the respondent's age there are differences in how an unexpected pregnancy is viewed: this is self-evident because an unexpected pregnancy presents greater biographical challenges for minors than it does for young adults (see Figure 3).

With increasing age the assessment that an unexpected pregnancy would be a 'disaster' shifts towards being 'unpleasant':

- 71 percent of minors say an unexpected pregnancy would be a 'disaster' while only 25 percent would class it as an 'unpleasant' experience.
- Among the 18- to 25-year-olds these attitudes shift substantially: roughly the same percentages say a pregnancy now would be a 'disaster' or would be 'unpleasant' (40% versus 38%). However, only 5 percent of the young adults would consider a pregnancy now 'positive' news.

Attitude to an unexpected pregnancy Perspective of the childless 14- to 25-year-olds



Basis: 14- to 25-year-olds who have not yet had children and who are not / whose partner is not currently pregnant | figures in percent
 Source: BZgA, data set Youth Sexuality, 2019 survey

Figure 3

The attitude towards unexpected parenthood is also influenced by the current circumstances of adolescents and young adults. If there is a steady – as yet childless – relationship, a sudden pregnancy would be much less likely to be a ‘disaster’ (35 %), than if this were to occur outside of a steady relationship (60 %). Nevertheless, even among the childless respondents in relationships the negative responses dominate in this scenario (at least ‘very unpleasant’: 77 %).

The negative attitude towards an unexpected pregnancy at a young age and the plan to have children later in life are nevertheless consistent. In 2019 the average age of a mother was older than 25 when her first child was born – 31.6 years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021b). Only a very small percentage of teenagers experience pregnancy: in 2019 the percentage of mothers who were under the age of 18 when they had their first child was not even 0.3 percent (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021a).

[See Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration - Fact Sheet 'In Focus: Becoming Sexually Active'](#)





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Notes on the data



- As the percentages shown has been rounded to whole numbers, it is possible that they may not add up to 100 percent.
- For the same reason the combined categories (e.g. 'very satisfied' and 'mostly satisfied') can deviate from the sum of the individual categories depicted.
- For questions where the respondents were able to pick several answers, the total figure can exceed 100 percent.
- Where data is available from previous surveys, the survey results are shown in a trend comparison. Because of how the samples were done it is possible to see the long-term trend covering almost 40 years for boys and girls between 14 and 17 without a migrant background.
- Participants are deemed to have a migrant background if they themselves or at least one parent was born without German citizenship; this definition is also used by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2021c).
- The level of education is determined by the (desired) qualifications the study participants were / are seeking at school based on the education system in Germany. Low: 9 years of school, most are around 15 years old when they leave (e.g. Hauptschule) Moderate: 10 years of school, most are around 16 years old when they leave (e.g. mittlere Reife). High: 12 to 13 years of school, most are 18 to 19 years old when they leave (e.g. Abitur).
- Because of the methodological design of the Youth Sexuality Study a further non-binary differentiation of gender has had to be left out. For this same reason, the term 'sex' (biological aspects, assigned by birth) continues to be used (in contrast to 'gender' in the sense of social construction, gender identity as personal internal perception of oneself) to enable statements on long-term trends (see also Census UK, 2019). This decision is purely a methodological necessity and not based on a lack of awareness of diversity here.

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The Research Project: Background, Research Team, Methodology

The Federal Centre for Health Education's (BZgA) representative study Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration is a repeat survey. In the summer of 2019 the ninth large-scale survey of young people, their parents and young adults began. A total of 6,032 interviews were conducted nationwide. Since 1980, the BZgA has been investigating the attitudes and behaviour of young people in the Federal Republic of Germany with regard to sexuality education, sexuality and contraception. This current study follows on from the previous years' studies with the explicit aim of illustrating trends.

Project profile

Client	Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)
Project lead	Angelika Hessling, BZgA
Survey institute	Kantar GmbH
Survey population	Adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25
Survey method	Computer-supported combined oral-written survey; for the more intimate questions the questionnaire was to be filled out by the respondents without the interviewers being able to see.
Selection method	A disproportionately selected quota sample with regards to sex, age and migrant background
Sample of young people	6,032 interviews of which 3,556 were with adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 and 2,476 with young adults between 18 and 25
Sample: parents	In the households of the 14- to 17-year-old adolescents without a migrant background one parent was also surveyed (2,422 interviews)
Weighting	All the data shown underwent a representative weighting in order to remove the sample's disproportionalities caused by the design.
Survey period	May to October 2019



More information about the study Youth Sexuality 9th Iteration Central results and further fact sheets

<https://www.sexualaufklaerung.de/en/english/projects/detail/youth-sexuality-9th-iteration/>