



Adolescent girls' experiences of unwanted intercourse and unintentional pregnancy:

A retrospective study

Anita Shaw,
M.A. (Gender Studies),
University of Northern British Columbia



Overview

- Choices
- Unwanted intercourse
- Research design
- Results

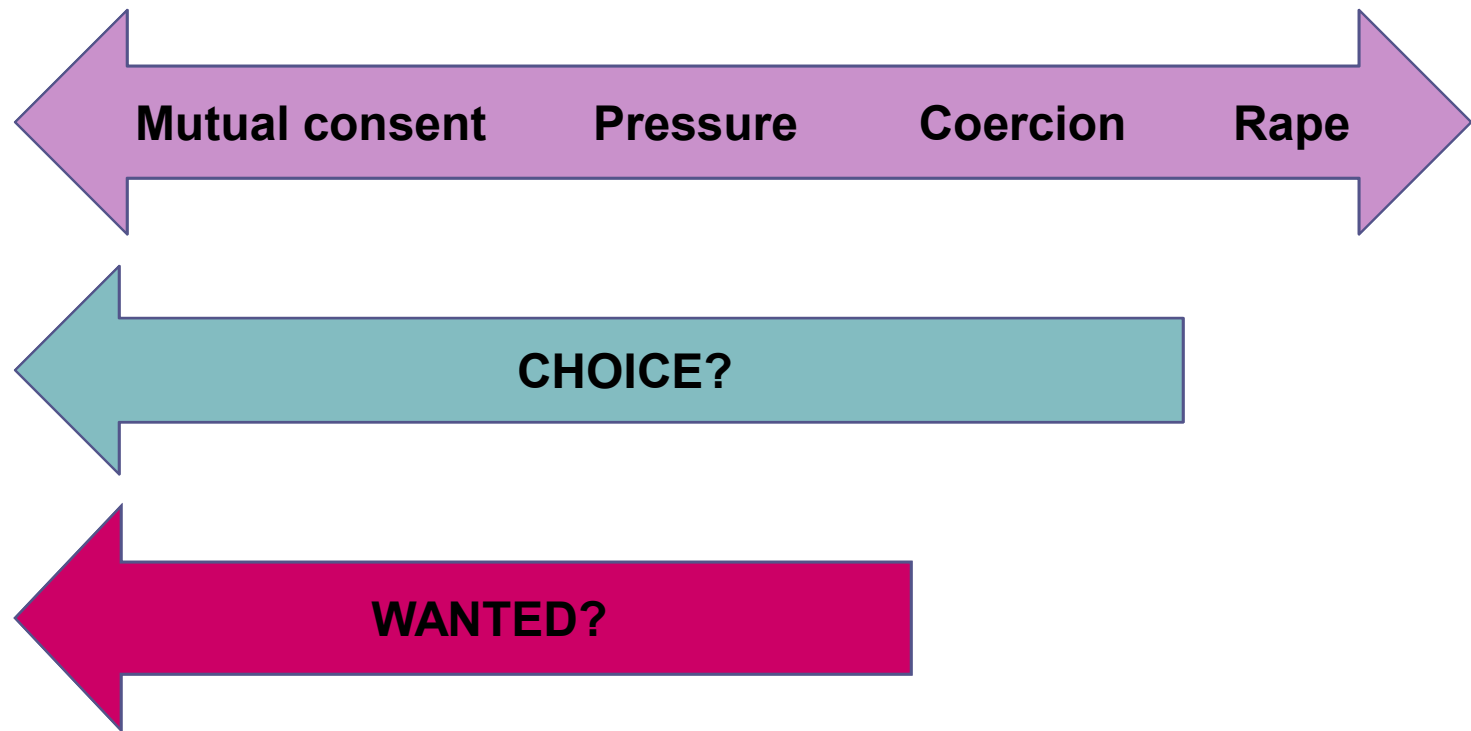


Choices

Stories about teenage sex and pregnancy emphasize choices; primarily girls' bad choices.

Sexual violence: A continuum

(Kelly, 1987).





Unwanted sex

Occurs when a person:

- is neither physically harmed,
- nor threatened with physical harm,
- complies due to social or interpersonal pressure

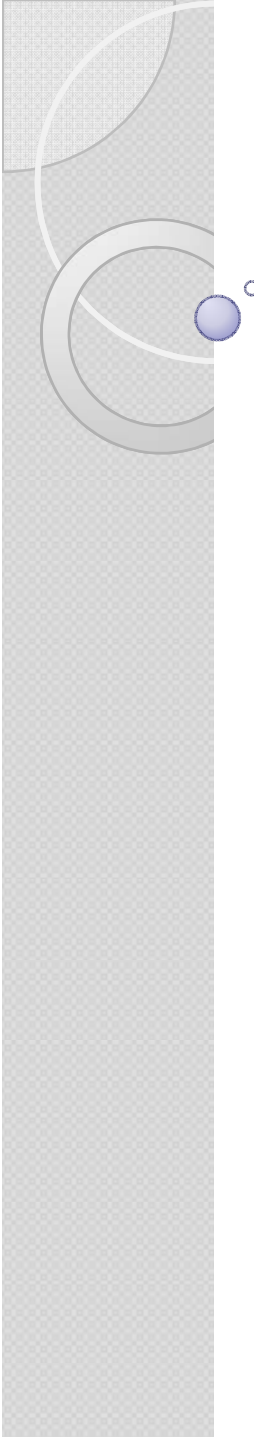
This takes place within 'typical', chosen romantic relationships

(Gavey, 1992; Kelly, 1987).



Sexual pressure

- **Interpersonal ~ Direct**
 - Economic dependence
 - Intoxication
 - Emotional manipulation
- **Social ~ Indirect**
 - Emphasized femininity
 - Compulsory heterosexuality
 - Dominant discourses, e.g. male sexual drive



“I had just given in to the pressure of having sex with my boyfriend. I realized that I hadn’t said that I wanted to have sex with him. I had just stopped saying ‘no’, and figured I might as well try it out”

First intercourse at age 17



Feminist perspective

- Gender inequality perpetuated:
 - Socially
 - Interpersonally

Intensified in heterosexual negotiations



Individual consequences

- **Ethical** (Humphreys, 2004).
- **Psychological and emotional** (e.g. Turner et al., 2010).
- **Further coercive experiences** (e.g. Smith et al., 2003).
- **Physical health** (e.g. Silverman et al., 2001).
 - **Pregnancy** (e.g. Shrier et al., 2004).



Research questions

1. How many girls experienced unwanted intercourse during adolescence?
2. What were the contexts of those experiences?
3. Did some girls experience this more than others?
4. Is unwanted intercourse associated with unintentional pregnancy?



The survey: Retrospective

- Internet-based questionnaire
 - Demographic information
 - Childhood sexual abuse
 - Unintentional pregnancy
 - Adapted Sexual Experiences Survey

(Koss & Oros, 1982)

- Social contexts
- Text box questions



15 contextual questions

Interpersonal:

Did you ever ... when **you were overwhelmed by his continual arguments or pressure?**

Social:

Incorporates feminist theory.

E.g. Emphasized femininity:

Did you ever ... because **you felt that he expected it?**

5 point Likert scale – never to always.



The Women

Age:

- 19 to 67 years of age;
mean = 39

Race/ethnicity:

- Aboriginal – 13%
- Caucasian – 80%

Sexual orientation:

- Heterosexual – 69%
- Lesbian – 11%
- Bi-sexual, queer, and questioning – 20%

Childhood Sexual Abuse
(before age 14): 41%

Socioeconomic status (during adolescence):

- Not enough – 30%
- Enough – 59%
- More than enough – 11%

Education:

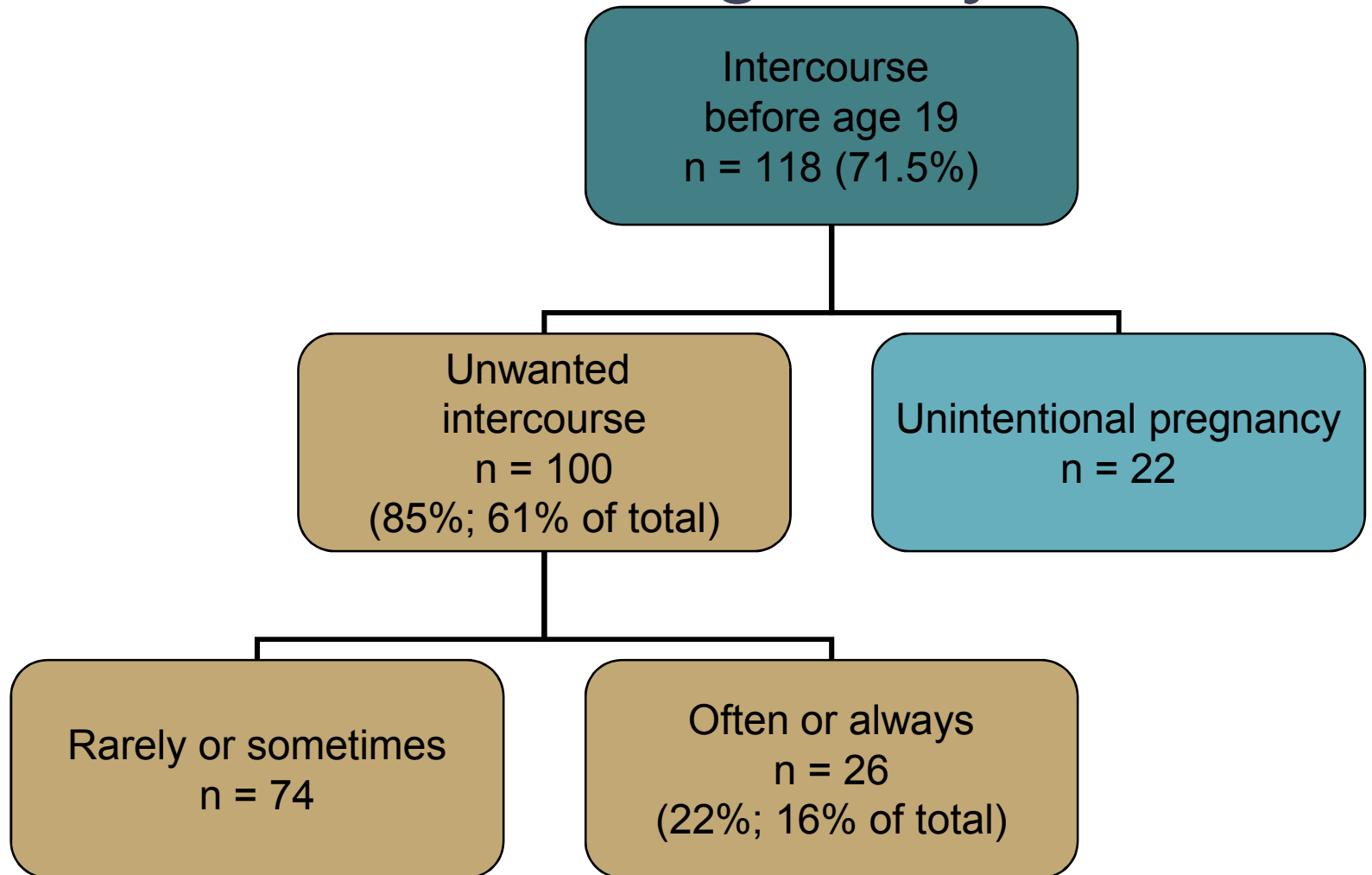
- High school – 100%
- Graduate degree – 26%

Location (during adolescence):

- Northern B.C. – 34%

$n = 165$

Unwanted Intercourse and Unintentional Pregnancy





Contexts of unwanted intercourse

Of the 118 women who had intercourse before 19:

1. She felt that he expected it **70% - at any level**
(23% 'often/always')
2. A way for the girl to receive affection or attention
63% (24%)
3. It seemed normal, that 'everyone was doing it'
60% (20%)
4. She was under the influence of drugs or alcohol
58% (21%)
- ...
15. She needed money/place to stay
16% (5%)

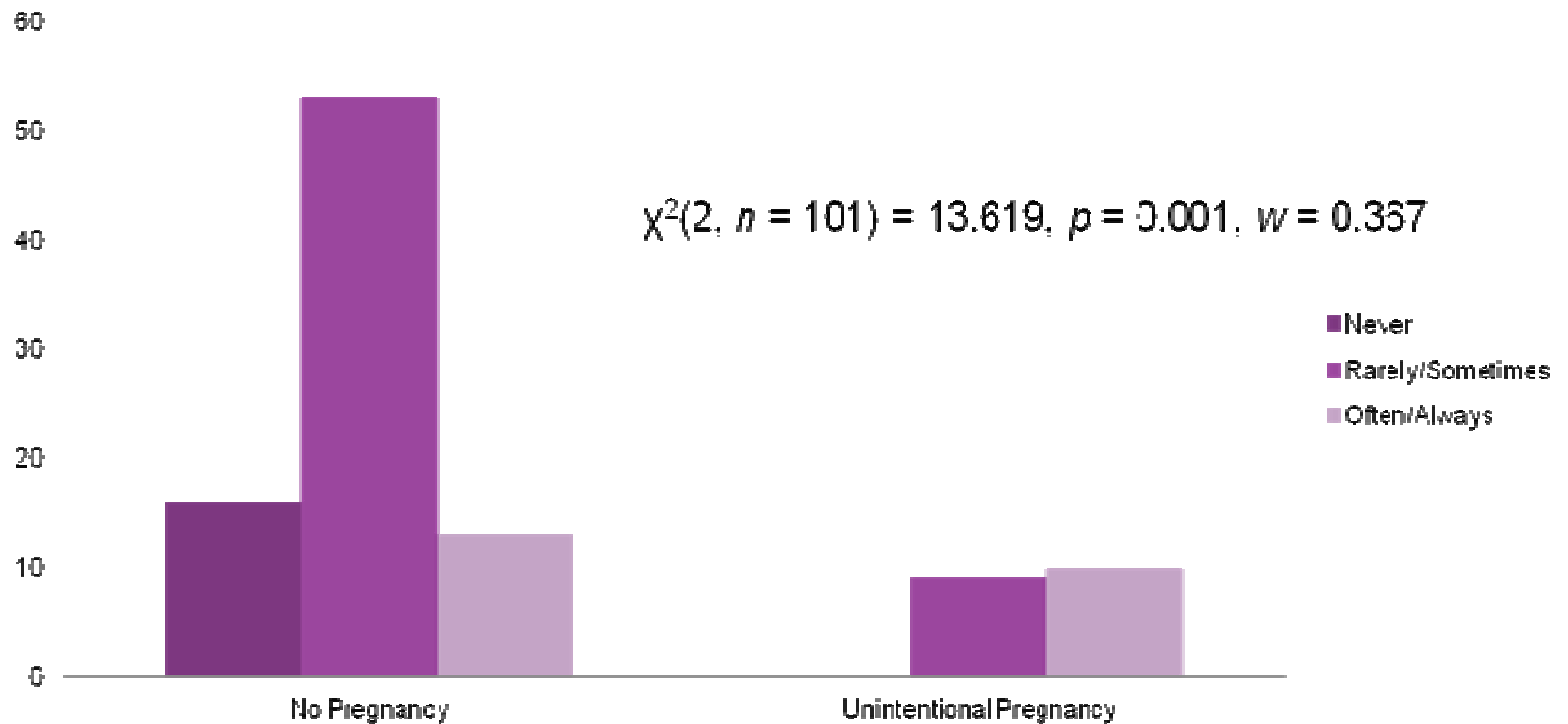


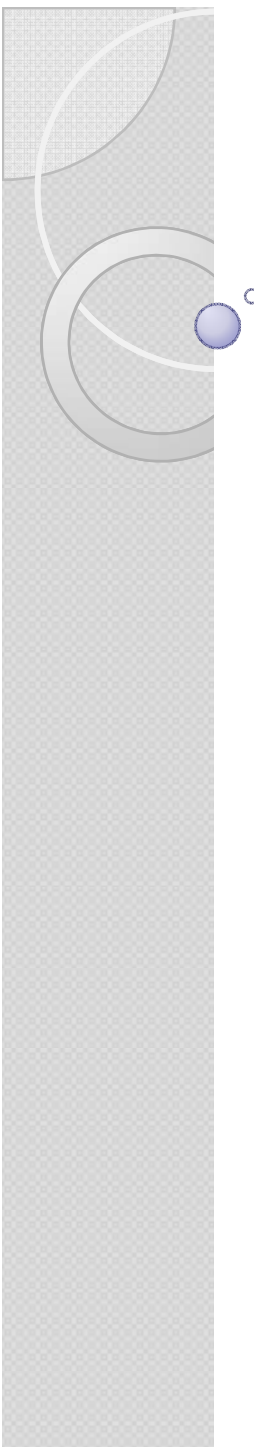
Some were more vulnerable

- **Childhood sexual abuse** prior to age 14 (41% of sample)
 - Training
 - Pain
- **Socioeconomic status** (low - 30%)
 - Right relationship
- **Ethnicity** (Aboriginal women - 13%)
 - Racism
 - Colonization

Is there an association between unwanted intercourse and adolescent pregnancy?

**Unintentional Adolescent Pregnancy as a function of
Frequency of Unwanted Intercourse**





“I felt it was the only way he would like me – and I was pressured a bit”

Unwanted intercourse ‘sometimes’
Unintentional pregnancy at 17

“My child's father was probably the only person up till that point that I had a good and equal sex life with”

Unwanted intercourse ‘often’
Unintentional pregnancy at 16

“I felt that it was a duty to provide sex to my partner(s)”

Unwanted intercourse ‘sometimes’
Unintentional pregnancy at 16



Sexual choices highly constrained

- Many engaged in unwanted intercourse
- Variety of social and interpersonal contexts
- Frequency associated with:
 - childhood sexual abuse,
 - socioeconomic status,
 - ethnicity,
 - and unintentional pregnancy



Thank you...

“To say that women often engage in unwanted sex with men is paradoxically to state the obvious and speak the unspeakable”

(Gavey, 1992, p. 325)