



Women's Reproductive Health Survey 2023 Summary of Initial Findings, October 2024

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Key messages

- The Women's Reproductive Health Survey is the **largest survey of its kind** to be undertaken in England to date, with a total of 59,332 responses.
- Painful or heavy **periods** were commonly reported and only a small proportion received professional help or advice for them in the last year. Of these, many experiences were negative.
- Most aged between 45-55 years did not report using hormone replacement therapy to help with symptoms of **menopause**. Of those who sought help or advice for menopause, experiences were generally positive.
- Common use of and good access to **contraception** were reported. Hormonal side effects were the most common reason for switching or stopping contraceptive methods.
- Of those who reported **pregnancy** in the last year, the majority were planned. A small percentage reported having had an abortion in the last year.
- Only a small percentage of those with **reproductive health symptoms and conditions** sought professional help or advice and experiences were mixed. Pain during or after sex was the most commonly reported symptom.
- **Further survey analysis and collaboration will help** to understand who are most affected and how support services can be improved.

Background

- The Women's Reproductive Health Survey was funded and commissioned by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to capture reproductive health experiences of women and people assigned as female at birth.
- The survey was aimed at those aged 16-55 years and resident in England. It covered: periods and menopause, preventing pregnancy and trying to get pregnant, pregnancy and birth experiences, and reproductive health conditions, such as endometriosis.
- Undertaking the survey was a commitment of the [Women's Health Strategy for England](#) under the previous government.
- The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) developed and piloted an original survey in 2021 (details can be found [here](#)). The survey was repeated in 2023 and advertised through social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, from 7th September to 19th October.
- The research team worked closely with voluntary partners [Birth Companions](#), [Brook](#), [LGBT Foundation](#) and [Race Equality Foundation](#) to increase awareness of the survey.

Who completed the 2023 survey?

- 59,332 people responded to the survey and 52,129 completed in full.
- The proportion of responses across regions were similar to those expected within the general population in England. Under 35s were moderately overrepresented.
- The survey did not achieve proportional representation for ethnicity, as 92.3% of respondents identified as White, 2.5% as Asian and 1.4% as Black, compared to 77.9%, 11.6% and 5.1%, respectively, in the general population.
- Of the sample, 72.6% reported they had a degree or equivalent, compared to 41.4% in the general population.
- The majority of respondents (96.2%) identified as a woman or girl, 1.6% identified as non-binary, 0.2% as trans male and 1.7% as a combination of gender identities.

Periods and menopause

- Among those who had a period in the last year, 63.7% reported **moderate to severe pain** and 50% reported **heavy bleeding** (having to change period products every 1-2 hours).

- 1 in 10 (11.8%) **missed, on average, three or more days of work or education** due to heavy bleeding or pain during their period.
- Only 23.0% with painful or heavy periods received **help or advice** from a health professional. Almost half (45.4%) were **dissatisfied or very dissatisfied** with their experience and 19.9% were **satisfied or very satisfied**.
- Among those aged 45-55 years, 4 in 10 (42.2%) had **not had a period** in the last year.
- 3 in 10 respondents aged 40-55 years (29.1%) had used **hormone replacement therapy** in the last year to help with symptoms of peri-menopause or menopause.
- Among respondents aged 40-55 years, 4 in 10 (39.7%) had received **help or advice** from a health professional in the last year about menopause-related concerns and 6 in 10 of this group (59.6%) were **satisfied or very satisfied** with the support received.

Contraception

- 7 in 10 respondents (69.0%) reported **using contraception** to prevent pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, or for other health reasons (such as acne or painful periods).
- The **most common contraceptive methods** were the condom (16.7%), the hormonal intrauterine device (IUD, 9.2%) and the progesterone-only pill (7.6%). 18.3% reported using long-acting reversible contraceptive method (implants and IUDs).
- Of those who reported having an IUD, 6 in 10 (60.2%) experienced **moderate or severe pain** when it was fitted.
- Nearly 9 in 10 (86.8%) were able to get their **preferred contraceptive method** from a service or purchase and over half (55.9%) within a week.
- Of those who used contraception in the last year, nearly a quarter (23.7%) reported that they had **stopped or switched** methods, most commonly due to the effect on their **mood** (35.7%), wanting to **give their body a break** from contraception (26.8%) and **changes in bleeding patterns** (26.7%). One in five (19.8%) stopped because they wanted to get pregnant.

Pregnancy

- Of those aged under 45, 1 in 10 (12.7%) reported that they had been **pregnant in the last year**.

- In relation to **planning**, 66.7% of respondents said their pregnancy was planned, 17.8% were ambivalent and 15.5% were unplanned.
- Of respondents under 45 years, 6.3% reported they had had a **live birth** and 1.3% reported they had had an **abortion** in the last year.
- Of those who had ever been pregnant, just under 1 in 10 (9.1%) reported having a **miscarriage** in the last year.
- Among respondents who reported ever having had vaginal intercourse, 18.9% had experienced **infertility** (had tried for more than one year without getting pregnant).
- Among respondents currently pregnant, pregnant in the last year or trying to conceive, 42.8% reported being **satisfied or very satisfied** with pre-conception help or advice they had received from health services, while 30% reported that they were **dissatisfied or very dissatisfied**.

Reproductive health symptoms & conditions

- The most common health **symptoms** reported included pain during and after sex (31.5%), pelvic pain not associated with periods (30.2%) and urinary incontinence (25.3%).
- When asked about **current conditions**, polycystic ovary syndrome was the most common (10.5%), followed by endometriosis (8.8%) and uterine fibroids (5.1%).
- Of those who reported current symptoms or conditions, 1 in 3 (32.6%) stated they had **not received any health professional help** or advice in the last year.

Next Steps

- The LSHTM research team hope that findings from the Reproductive Health Surveys will help monitor how government policies and NHS programmes are working towards improving reproductive health and experiences.
- Planned in-depth analysis of the data collected will help further understanding of who is most affected by reproductive health conditions and how support can best be provided across different stages of people's lives.

The views expressed in this document are those of the research team and not necessarily those of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).