

# Selling sex on the doorstep

*Development activities to maximise  
response on the National Survey of  
Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles*

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SRA Annual Conference 2010



Natsal  
2010

## Introduction

- Climate of decreasing response rates
- Increasing amount of effort needed to maximise response
- Efforts to increase response often reactive, untested and after surveys have been launched into the field
  - Hence are often very expensive
  - And not necessarily successful or cost effective
- In a climate of decreasing budgets more thought is needed on how to maintain response rates without (overly) increasing costs
- This presentation reflects on recent experience developing the 3<sup>rd</sup> National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles

## This presentation

- History of the Natsal surveys
- Outline of Natsal 2010:
  - Scope
  - Coverage
  - Development work
- The problem – Response rates
  - What would *you* have done?
  - What we did
  - Preliminary results
- Concluding thoughts

# History



## Background (1)

- Prior to 1990, relatively little research in the area of sexual behaviour
- Rise of AIDS in 1980s meant data on sexual behaviour and attitudes urgently needed
- First large-scale study of sexual lifestyles and attitudes in a random sample of the population designed in 1987
- Survey vetoed in 1989 by UK Government

# Thatcher halts survey on sex

THE prime minister has vetoed plans for the biggest-ever official investigation of Britain's sexual habits. She believes the £750,000 government survey would invade the privacy of the 20,000 people due to be questioned.

The decision has angered medical researchers, who say the inquiry would have produced the most comprehensive picture of sexual activity yet compiled and provided valuable information for the battle against Aids.

Interviews should have started last April but the project, enthusiastically supported by government medical officers, was postponed by the Department of Health after resistance from 10 Downing Street.

Thatcher has now rejected the project, which would have involved adults answering detailed and explicit questions about their sex lives.

Authoritative sources say Thatcher doubted whether such intimate questioning would produce accurate responses, and questioned the credibility of the exercise.

It was also said she feared the government could be "tainted" by undertaking a survey which could give rise to "unseemly speculation" in the popular press.

The veto has angered Aids researchers. "This is not a survey motivated by prurient curiosity into people's private lives," said Kaye Wellings, a research officer at the Health Education Authority.

"It is unthinkable that this study should not go ahead. A

by Michael Durham  
and David Hughes

tremendous amount of hard work and careful preparation has gone into making it reliable. The data is urgently needed for prediction and prevention of HIV."

Last night a political row broke over Thatcher's veto, with Labour claiming it was vital the survey goes ahead.

Harriet Harman, Labour's health spokesman, said: "It does not ring true for this government to be ditching this survey on the basis of privacy and confidentiality. I do not accept this contention from a government which has shown itself to be no respecter of privacy anywhere else. This survey must go ahead on scientific and medical grounds."

The survey, funded by the Health Education Authority, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Department of Health, was de-

## Aids epidemic 'peaking'

RESEARCH published last week by the Royal Society suggests that Aids cases among male homosexuals may stabilise at about 200-300 cases a quarter in 1989-90.

It also indicates that the number of homosexuals infected with HIV will peak at 10,000-15,000 and slowly decline over many decades.

Unpublished results from one of the pilot projects for the

study are believed to show that sexual habits are changing.

Late last year, a Department of Health committee predicted that by 1992 the number of new cases of Aids would reach at least 3,500. Now it has revised the estimate to about 1,000 new cases a year; and experts believe the first wave of the epidemic may be near its peak. Eight hundred cases were reported last year.

signed to provide a detailed scientific basis for future campaigns against Aids. Thatcher's ruling that it should be scrapped came after an intense Whitehall battle. Her opposition means the inquiry could only proceed if the Economic and Social Research Council was able to press ahead independently.

The intention was to ask a random sample of 20,000 adults to fill in a confidential questionnaire describing their first sexual experience, the frequency of recent sexual activity, whether it was homosexual or heterosexual, within or outside marriage, and what type of activity was engaged in.

A separate section dealt with attitudes towards permissiveness, homosexuality and abortion; awareness of health education issues; and personal assessments of their risk of contracting HIV or other sexually-transmitted diseases.

Two pilot studies have been carried out. A feasibility study involving 1,000 adults was published in April. The results of a similar pilot project will be unveiled this week. Researchers say those prove that the proposed survey is scientifically sound.

Staff at two London medical colleges, at Imperial College, London, and at a research agency, have been standing by to begin the study. Funding from the Health Education Authority and the Economic and Social Research Council has been guaranteed.

Leading academics who have spent more than two years preparing the ground say the information sought would be of enormous value in estimating how many could be at risk from Aids and other sexually-transmitted diseases.

It would enable Aids workers to plan future levels of hospital care and to judge the effectiveness of education campaigns.

Professor Roy Anderson, professor of epidemiology at Imperial College, London, and one of the project's four-man steering group, said yesterday: "I'm very disappointed if the government's scientists have been unable to persuade politicians of the value of this work."

"It is an important survey. It would put us in a better position to assess how the epidemic will spread in coming decades and to see whether behaviour has changed after five years of anti-Aids campaigns."

# Thatcher veto on sex survey is condemned

AN ATTACK on political interference with a survey of sexual habits and Britain's "disgraceful" science education was launched yesterday by the new president of the British Association, Sir Claus Moser, during his address to the annual conference in Sheffield.

On education, Sir Claus said: "Unless we do something really radical and major we will become through our kids one of the least educated countries in the western world."

He also commented on reports that Mrs Thatcher's vetoed a survey of Britain's sexual habits which would have been invaluable for assessing the efficacy of Aids campaigns and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

Sir Claus, warden of Wadham College, Oxford, and former head of the Central Statistical Office, attacked the decision while describing the "awesome problems facing this country on the science side."

He said Governments worldwide "and not least our own tend to think that they can drive blindfold without being informed about what is happening in society."

"I have an enormous respect for what can be done with statistics but I get terribly depressed when there is any interference."

"I was head of statistics for 10 years and my main theme was integrity. It must be left to the scientist to decide what information to collect, how to pub-

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Conference reports by  
Roger Highfield and  
Adrian Berry

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Sir Claus Moser: "Aids study is vital"

"If I became dictator, which

## Background (1)

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- Rise of AIDS in 1980s meant data on sexual behaviour and attitudes urgently needed
- First large-scale study of sexual lifestyles and attitudes in a random sample of the population designed in 1987
- Survey vetoed in 1989 by UK Government
- Wellcome Trust stepped in with funding and survey launched in 1990
- 20,000 interviews with 16-59 year olds
- Main focus on HIV

# PILE 'EM HIGH

*KipperWilliams*



Sunday Times 6.2.94

## Background (2)

- By the end of the 1990s urgent need for an update following increases in STDs and teenage pregnancy
- Natsal 2000 funded by MRC
- 12,000 interviews with 16-44 year olds + London and Ethnic boosts
- Focus on HIV, STIs and general sexual health
- Behavioural and biological measures (Chlamydia testing)
- Worrying trends such as increases in risk taking in behaviours between 1990 and 2000

The Times  
30th Nov 2001



News

# More sex please – we're young, female, liberated and British

Survey shows women have more partners than ever before

Sarah Boseley Health editor

Women are experiencing a second sexual liberation, every bit as controversial as that of the Swinging Sixties. Forty years after



**Sexual behaviour**  
Number of partners in a lifetime  
All ages, %

Age at first intercourse	Men (%)	Women (%)
16-17	7.2%	5.3%
18-19	34.6%	19.4%
20-21	25.2%	26.1%
22-23	11.0%	7.5%
24-25	14.6%	14.6%

Age at first intercourse

The Guardian, 30th Nov 2001

Daily Mail, Friday, November 30, 2001

# Women who wish they'd waited for the first time

The Daily Mail, 30th Nov 2001

# BUNK UP BRITAIN

## We're crazier than ever for sex

**HORNY Brits are having more rumpy-pumpy than ever.**

And sex-crazed kids are much younger when they lose their virginity. Three-in-10 blokes and over a quarter of girls between 16 and 19 went all the way BEFORE their 16th birthday. A quarter of girls and almost a third of boys have

The Daily Star, 30th Nov 2001

Metro, 30th Nov 2001

# Sex diseases rampant in age of promiscuity

BY DAVID FICKLING

RISKY sex is leading to a dramatic increase in sexually transmitted diseases, it was revealed yesterday.

A survey charting sexual behaviour in Britain shows we are sleeping with more partners than ten years ago.

More people are cheating on their partners, more are experimenting with homosexuality, especially women, while more men are visiting prostitutes.

One in ten adults has had a sexually transmitted infection, the £1.4-million Government survey of sexual attitudes and lifestyles found.

And one in 23 men has paid for sex in the past five years, rising to one in

## HOW TO BEAT INFECTIONS

■ **Chlamydia:** A bacterial STD which infects the genitals and sometimes the eyes and throat. It can cause infection of the Fallopian tubes in women, leading to infertility. It can be cured with antibiotics.

■ **Gonorrhoea:** An infection which can cause ectopic pregnancy, sterility and increased risk of HIV. It can spread into the uterus and Fallopian tubes. The infection can also cause complications during pregnancy, including an increased risk of stillbirth. Babies of infected women can be born blind or suffering from meningitis. Penicillin and other

antibiotics are effective treatments but early diagnosis is important.

■ **Syphilis:** A contagious disease which increases risk of HIV infection. Although in the first phase sufferers may develop sores on their genitals or in the mouth, often there are no noticeable symptoms. If it is left untreated, the symptoms will disappear, but the germ will remain in the body and progress into the third stage, which may seriously damage the brain, heart, and nervous system, and possibly cause death. It can also seriously harm a developing foetus. Antibiotics can cure the disease if caught early.



The chlamydia bacteria

# Natsal 2010



## Natsal 2010

- Funded jointly through Wellcome Trust and MRC grants
- Consortium of NatCen, UCL and LSHTM
- 15,000 interviewers with **16-74** year old + young people boost
- Broader sexual health focus, including sexual function
- CAPI + CASI + qualitative follow ups
- Behavioural and (more) biological measures
- Fieldwork spread over 2 years
- Reporting in 2013

## Topic coverage

### Face to face

- General health
- Family when growing up
- Learning about sex
- First sexual experiences
- Contraception
- Sexual attraction and experience
- Attitudes towards sex and relationships
- Demographic questions
  
- Urine sample
- Saliva sample

### CASI

- Behaviours and partnership history
- Details of most recent partners
- Paying for sex
- Sex abroad
- Nonconsensual sex
- Pregnancy and parenting history
- Fertility intentions and infertility
- Sexual function
- STIs
- Circumcision
- Mood and wellbeing

## What is Natsal used for?

- Key resource for scientists, clinicians and policy makers
- Regularly informs sex education policy and public health planning
- Natsal 2000 main source of information for:
  - Teenage Pregnancy Strategy
  - National Sexual Health and HIV Strategy
  - Chlamydia Screening Programme

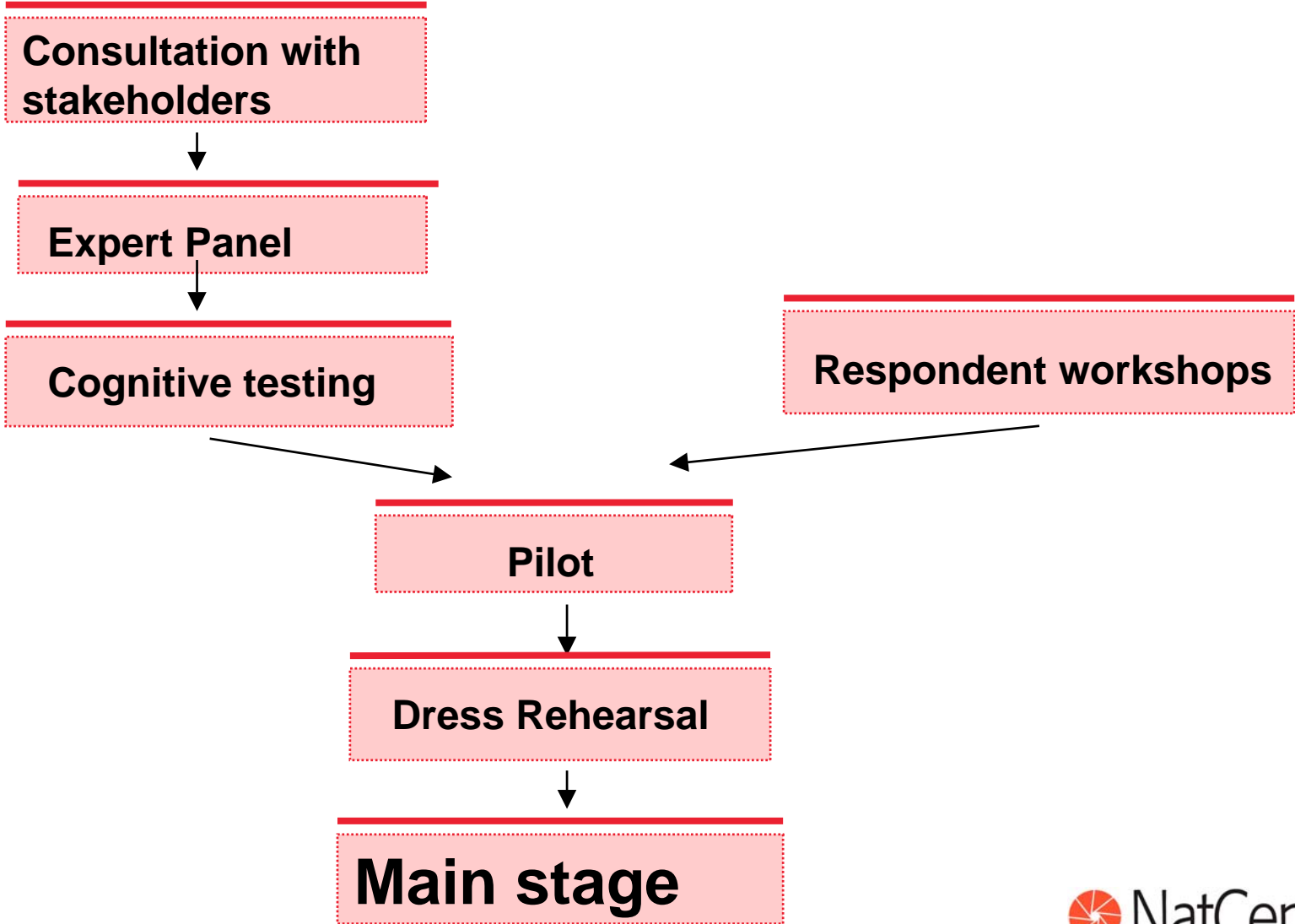
# Response rates



## Response rates

- Natsal 1990: 64.7%
- Natsal 2000: 62.9%
- Natsal 2010: ?!

# Development work: 2 years



## Response rates

- Natsal 1990: 64.7%
- Natsal 2000: 62.9%
- Natsal 2010: **37.9%?!**



## Pilot advance letter

Think about:

- Visual design and layout
- Content
- Survey identity / overall impression

Be honest!

## What next?

- Consulted widely within organisation, literature, advisory group
- Got an external communications company to redesign our advance letter and work on survey branding
- Respondent website
- Consider increasing the token of appreciation
- Web option for some unproductives
- Motivate interviewers

# Results



## Response rates

- Natsal 1990: 64.7%
- Natsal 2000: 62.9%
- Natsal 2010 pilot 1: 37.9%
- Natsal 2010 pilot 2: 50.3%
- Natsal 2010 main stage wave 1 (with reissues): 55+%

## Comments on letter

- “Just wanted to say how enjoyable this study is proving to be ... really appreciate the slick appearance of the introductory paperwork. it's making the doorstep introductions so much easier than some other projects” *Interviewer*
- “I have been speaking to quite a few interviewers today and the one common thing they are praising is the advance letter, basically saying that they are not having trouble selling the study on the doorstep at all as the advance letter is so clear and precise, it is a case of when can you do the interview” *Ops staff*



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# Natsal

The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles

Jan 2010 | Topic | Health & Lifestyle

Researcher | Multiple Researchers

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## About this study

The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal) is the largest scientific study of sexual behaviour since the pioneering studies of Alfred Kinsey in the US in the 1940s and 1950s.

Natsal was originally set up because of an urgent need for information about sexual lifestyles in the context of the HIV/ AIDS epidemic.

## Token of appreciation experiment

- Natsal 2010 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot and Main stage Wave 1 experimented with £15 and £30 'tokens of appreciation'

	2 <sup>nd</sup> pilot	
£15	47.1%	
£30	53.4%	
Difference	6.3%	
Base	(217) (217)	

## Natsal 2010 - incentive amounts

- Natsal 2010 2<sup>nd</sup> pilot and Main stage Wave 1 experimented with £15 and £30 ‘tokens of appreciation’

	2 <sup>nd</sup> pilot	Mainstage W1
£15	47.1%	51.9%
£30	53.4%	53.5%
Difference	6.3%	1.6%
Base	(217) (217)	(3375) (3375)



## Interviewer comments

- “One of the best most inspiring briefings ever attended”
- “Having the professor to talk was informative and gave lots of pointers to use on the doorstep”
- “I liked the film – it worked!”
- “I came away from the briefing feeling inspired about the importance of the survey and with a clear idea of the things it has achieved in the past and with good arguments for the doorstep”



## Welcome to the Natsal 2010 web study website.

Natsal 2010 is a national study of health and relationships that takes place every 10 years across Britain. It is funded by the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Council. We are asking you to take part in this important study online to help improve health education, family planning, and other health services that we may all need throughout our lives.

Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and no-one looking at the study findings will be able to identify you in any way.

We hope you'll be willing to take part.

Before you start, please click on 'more information' to read our short information page about the Natsal 2010 study. This tells you more about the study, and also answers some frequently asked questions. When you have finished reading it, you can click on 'start survey' at the bottom of the page to begin the questionnaire.

[More Information](#)

## Concluding thoughts

- No easy answer to response rate problems
- Some Natsal solutions may not be applicable to other surveys and other subject matters
- Communication is key
- Consult widely for possible solutions
- Time and money up front likely to save (more) time and (more) money later on

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# Thank you

Website:

[www.natsal.org](http://www.natsal.org)

Interviewer video:

<http://www.natcen.ac.uk/natsaltrainingvideo/index.htm>

Contact:

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Natsal  
2010