

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid 38% of UA students who are single or dating have never had sexual intercourse. (2006 Health and Wellness Survey, n= 3102)

Q. Has sex among teenagers increased?

A. Since a little over one-third of UA undergraduates fall into this category (i.e. 19 and under), this is a question on the minds of students and researchers alike. At first look, it certainly seems like there is more sex going on. Whether flipping through a magazine, watching TV, listening to lyrics or scanning the ads in this newspaper - you'll find a hyped-up version of sex almost anywhere you go.

But since you are asking about facts and not just how things appear on the surface, you may be surprised to hear that the numbers tell a different story. According to the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) National Youth Risk Behavior Survey from 1991 to 2005, the percentage of teens who had ever had sexual intercourse actually *decreased* over the past fifteen years. Huh?

That's right, recent trend data shows that there are fewer teens having sex, not the other way around. What's more, the survey also found that more teens had abstained from sexual activity in the previous three months, fewer had four or more sexual partners in their lifetime and condom use had increased.

Research indicates that the best way to deliver sexual health information to teens is to tell it like it is. Teens should know that sex is a real thing that has both physical and emotional dimensions, along with positive and negative attributes. Sultry vodka ads with bikinis don't say that, but neither do fear-based campaigns that tell students to avoid sex at all costs.

Here at the UA, one way we approach sexual health is to bring accurate information to the table. The 2006 Health and Wellness Survey revealed that 51% of UA undergraduates did not have intercourse in the past school year, and over one third have never had sex. If these percentages seem high, think about the messages that form the basis of our perceptions. Are they real or are they caricatures? Because when it comes to sex, seeing isn't always believing.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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