

## **Differences in reported sexual activity between adolescents attending general practice in metropolitan and rural/regional areas of Victoria**

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**Background/Aims:**

Understanding adolescent sexual activity, including differences in sexual activity between metropolitan and rural/regional areas, can inform training and resources needed when providing sexual healthcare in general practice.

**Methods/Approach:**

As a part of a randomised controlled trial in general practice (RAd Health Trial), we invited young people aged between 16-24 from 42 practices across Victoria to complete an online survey to explore their health and well-being.

We compare sexual practices of adolescents in rural/regional areas with those in metropolitan areas.

**Results/Outcomes/Impact:**

Between May 2024 and January 2025, 1527 young people from 42 (32 metropolitan; 10 rural/regional) general practices were recruited: 421 (27.6%) from rural/regional and 1,106 (72.4%) from metropolitan clinics. Rural participants were more likely to be sexually active (68.4% rural/regional; 56.3% metro,  $p < 0.001$ ) and to have experienced non-consensual sex (22.3% rural/regional; 14.9% metro,  $p < 0.001$ ) after adjusting for age and gender. Age of first sex was lower in rural/regional areas, with 35.4% reporting first sex aged 15 or lower, compared with 25.9% in metropolitan areas ( $p < 0.001$ ). Condom use was similar in both groups (42.3% rural/regional vs 40.7% metro;  $p = 0.765$ ) but respondents aged 19-24 had lower odds of reporting condom use during last sex compared with those aged 16-18 (OR 0.4, 95% CI: 0.3-0.5). Similar numbers of young people in rural/regional and metropolitan areas reported an STI diagnosis in the past year (14.7% vs 12.8%;  $p = 0.597$ ) and this did not differ with age and gender. Most reported ever having viewed pornography (69.6% rural/regional and 63.1% metro;  $p = 0.003$  after adjusting for age and gender). The odds of ever having watched pornography was higher in rural/regional participants (OR 2.0, CI: 1.38-2.92) and in males (OR 4.15, 95% CI: 2.78-6.20).

**Conclusion:**

Respondents from rural areas in our study commenced sexual activity younger than their metropolitan counterparts and were more likely to report non-consensual sex. Awareness of these differences can inform training and resources needs for general practice in rural/regional health areas.

**Disclosure of Interest Statement**

The RAd Health trial is funded by The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).