

# Why are young adults having less casual sex?

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Casual sex is on the decline for both young men and women, according to a Rutgers University-New Brunswick study that found less alcohol consumption among both genders is a major reason, while playing video games and living at home with parents are another—but only for men.

The study, published in the journal *Socius*, found that between 2007 and 2017, the percentage of 18-to 23-year-old men who had casual sex in the past month dropped from 38 percent to 24 percent. The percentage dropped from 31 percent to 22 percent for young women of the same age.

The most important factor driving the decline among young men is the decrease in drinking, which alone explains more than 33 percent of the drop. The increase in computer video gaming explains about 25 percent of the change in [sexual behavior](#) among young men, while the increase in living with parents explains a little more than 10 percent. No other factor explained a significant portion of the decline.

"The recent cohorts of young people adopt adult roles later in their lives and depend on their parents for longer periods," said the study's co-author Lei Lei, an assistant professor of sociology at Rutgers. "The declining engagement in casual sex among this age group could be another sign of delayed transition into adulthood."

For young women, about 25 percent is attributable to a decline in drinking, which was the only factor that explained a significant portion of the decline. Increased [internet usage](#) among young women suppressed what would have been a larger 11 percent decline in casual sex. The study said that while both [young women](#) and men play computer games more frequently now than in the past, gaming inhibits only young men's casual sexual activity.

Researchers say the odds that young men who live with their parents engage in casual sex are only 63 percent of those who live independently. The odds that young men who play computer games daily have casual sex are less than half the odds for those who never game. And the odds that young men who report drinking daily have casual sex are about 5.5 times the odds for those who don't drink.

"The new generation of young adults became more individualistic and less social in real life, but more involved in [social media](#) and online gaming networks," said Lei. "The changes in how young people socialize affect their opportunity to have casual sex, which often serves as a trial or rehearsal for long-term romantic relationships."

Trends in young adults' financial insecurity, including their student debt loan, do not appear to underlie their change in casual sexual activity. Nor does an increase in time spent watching television.

Researchers analyzed [survey data](#) from the 2007-2017 Panel Study of Income Dynamics Transition to Adulthood Supplement, which interviewed about 2,000 young adults ages 18 to 23 and focused on sexual activity outside of committed relationships. They examined whether changes in young adults' economic status, living arrangement, technology use and drinking behavior helped explain the decline in [casual sex](#).

**More information:** Scott J. South et al, Why Are Fewer Young Adults Having Casual Sex?, *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/2378023121996854](https://doi.org/10.1177/2378023121996854)

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