

RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR AND DRUG USE IN THE RECREATIONAL NIGHTLIFE CONTEXT. A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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The aim of this study was to analyze the relationship between the use of alcohol and other drugs and sexual risk behaviour, within the weekend recreational nightlife context. A survey was carried out in three Spanish regions (Balearic Islands, Galicia, and Comunidad Valenciana) with a sample of 440 young people (52.3% women and 47.7% men) aged 14-25 who regularly take part in recreational nightlife activity. Selection of participants was made using the Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) procedure. The results indicate that men had more sexual relations under the effects of alcohol and other drugs than did women; however, there were no significant differences between the sexes in the use of condoms, or in having had sexual relations that they regretted later on. Frequency of going out in the nightlife context increased the level of drug use and the probability of having sexual relations under the effects of substances. However, no relationship was found between frequency of going out in the nightlife context and sexual risk practices.

En este estudio se analiza la relación entre el consumo de alcohol y otras drogas con la conducta sexual de riesgo, dentro del contexto recreativo nocturno de fin de semana. Se realizó una encuesta en tres regiones españolas (Baleares, Galicia y Comunidad Valenciana) a una muestra de 440 jóvenes (52,3% mujeres y 47,7% hombres) de entre 14-25 años, que frecuentan la actividad recreativa nocturna. Para la selección de los participantes se utilizó el procedimiento de Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS). Los resultados indicaron que los varones tenían más relaciones sexuales bajo los efectos del alcohol y otras drogas que las mujeres; sin embargo, no había diferencias significativas entre los sexos en la utilización de preservativo ni en haber mantenido relaciones sexuales de las que luego manifestaban arrepentimiento. Las frecuencias de las salidas nocturnas aumentan el consumo de drogas y la probabilidad de mantener relaciones sexuales bajo los efectos de las sustancias. Sin embargo, la relación entre salidas nocturnas y las prácticas sexuales de riesgo no queda demostrada.

Going out to have fun at weekends, for both men and women, has a great deal to do with sex and drugs. At the same time, the aesthetic and cultural meaning of nightspots is designed to facilitate meeting, inter-relation and sex (Gilbert & Pearson, 2003). An integral part of the recreational nightlife context is the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs (Hughes & Bellis, 2006; EMCD-DA, 2006; Calafat, Fernández, Juan, Anttila, Arias, Bellis et al., 2003; Parker, Williams, & Aldridge, 2002).

Values in relation to sexuality have changed in recent decades (Giddens, 1995; Chaplin, 2000) in our sociocultural context. Young Spaniards have been socialized according to more liberal values that have given rise to a new regulatory system of sexuality which defines it as a pleasurable, prestigious and healthy experience subject solely to one's own personal decision

(INJUVE, 2005). The importance young people give to sexuality has increased (Elzo, 2005) in parallel with an increase in the desire for goals related to immediate pleasure without commitment (Bauman, 2005). These are profound changes that have gone hand in hand with other changes in the socio-economic structure, and which are coherent with a society that tends toward liberalism and surrenders a part of its ethical regulations to the market (Bauman, 2004, 2005). However, and despite such changes, the unequal relationship between the genders in this regard has been broadly maintained, with the continuity of a dominant androcentric sexuality (Megias, Rodríguez, Méndez, & Pallars, 2005). Out of this emerges the need for a differentiated understanding of sexuality and other practices, especially when they are associated with the use of drugs (Gómez, 2005).

Some research has shown that the prospect of sexual encounters can lead to more risky drug-use behaviours (Elliot, Morrison, Ditton, Farrall, Short et al., 1998; Brook, 2002), though other studies have failed to find such a relationship (Friedman, McCarthy, Förster, & Denzler, 2005; Liao, DiClemente, Wingood, Crosby,

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Williams, Harrington et al., 2002). It would also seem that the fact of having consumed alcohol and drugs can influence risky sexual practices (Breen, Degenhart, Kinner, Bruno, Jenkinson, Matthews, & Newman, 2006; Calafat, Fernández, & Juan, 2001; Ford & Norris, 1994), though this relationship is also not found consistently (Taylor, Fulop, & Green, 1999).

Data on the use of drugs in the recreational nightlife context and its relation to risky sexual practices (Rodríguez et al., 2006; Parsons et al., 2004; Bellis & Hughes, 2006) from other countries suggest a substantial increase in risky sexual behaviours, except in the case of Elliot et al.'s (1998) study. In the Spanish context there has been little empirical research focusing on the description and understanding of the link between sexuality, drugs and the recreational context, though the study by Martínez García (1998), for example, provides evidence of a relationship between risk behaviours (including those of sexual risk) in young people and drug use.

Recent decades have seen an increase in the use of drugs among young Spanish women, the rate now approaching that of men; indeed, young women's use of tobacco (smoking) and tranquillizers have surpassed those of young males (Observatorio Español sobre Drogas, 2007). Advertising and the media contribute to the considerable social pressure on young women to be sexually active and seductive (Pérez, 2007), so that this is becoming a norm and a necessity (Esteban, 2004). Consequently, it is important to explore the nature of this process of 'convergence' in gender relationships and to understand that it is not simply a question of quantities (how much is drunk, number of times the person is drunk), but also of the motivations and expectations behind the alcohol and drug use, as well as taking into account the types of consequences such convergent behaviour may have.

In the present study we explore the differences by sex, and with implications for gender relations, in risky sexual behaviours deriving from the use of drugs. The other aspect we consider is the extent to which the recreational context influences such risky sexual behaviours in young drug users.

METHOD

Participants

We carried out a survey of 440 young people involved in recreational nightlife activity. Inclusion criteria were aged under 25, regularly going out at night, self-reported users of alcohol and/or some other drug (legal or illegal), and being sexually active. The final sample included

52.3% women and 47.7% men. In terms of age group, 22.5% were aged 14 to 18 and 77.5% between 19 and 25. The majority (93%) were unmarried, though 30% had a partner. Sixty-four per cent lived with their family of origin, 6.8% with their partner, and the rest with friends, alone or in halls of residence. Almost half had completed or were following courses of higher education. In all, 43% described their principal occupation as "student", whilst 23% had a permanent job and 16.7% a temporary job. Half described themselves as middle-class, 32% as upper-middle or upper class, and 12% as lower-middle or working class.

Instruments

For the survey we used a questionnaire with structured questions, self-administered and anonymous. This instrument was designed to elicit information about recreational nightlife habits (10 items), friends whom the respondent goes out with (7 items), drug use (16 items), negative consequences of use (13 items), related risk behaviours, especially concerning sexuality (36 items), violence and driving (26 items), and finally, sociodemographic aspects (12 items). The questionnaire had been validated in previous studies (Calafat, Fernández, Juan, Anttila, Arias, Bellis et al., 2003).

Procedure

The survey was carried out in three Spanish regions (Balearic Islands, Galicia and Comunidad Valenciana) following the snowball procedure, but structured with *Respondent Driven Sampling* (RDS), thanks to which it was possible to include criteria that improved the randomness of the sample configuration, the validity and the reliability of the results obtained (Heckathorn, 1997 and 2002). Recruitment began with nine seeds, three per Region, who put the interviewers in contact with young people that met the inclusion criteria. The total sample obtained attained highly acceptable validity, with an approximation of 0.4% for gender and 1.3% for age groups to the theoretical sample in equilibrium (tolerance levels must be below 2%); the procedure is described in more detail in Mantecón, Juan, Calafat, Becoña and Román (2008).

Data analysis

For the sampling analysis we used the specific software RDSAT (*Respondent Driven Sampling Analysis Tool v. 5.0.1.*). The statistical data analysis began with an analysis of frequencies that revealed the descriptive statistics. *A posteriori* we carried out correlation analyses between variables of the use of different drugs,

risks in general and sexual-behaviour risks in correlation with variables of gender, age and recreational nightlife involvement. The analyses were carried out using the SPSS 11.5 statistical package.

RESULTS

The majority of the participants (94%) had had full sexual relations. The percentage of women who had done so was lower (statistically significant: $\chi^2 = 8.84$; $p < 0.1$). However, there were no differences as regards age at first full intercourse (16.30 years; S.D. = 2.04). Initiation was prior to age 15 for 15.8% of the participants; between 15 and 16 for 39.3%; between 17 and 18 for 35.3%; and at age 19 or over for 9.7%.

Use of drugs and recreational activity

As already mentioned, the sample is made up of young people who like to go out and have fun on weekend nights. Taking into account three variables (number of weekends per month on which they go out, number of nights they go out per weekend, and how many hours they stay out each time) related to the frequency of going out and the time devoted to it in the last month, we defined four types of user, according to their greater or lesser involvement in this activity. In accordance with this classification, the least involved would account for 20.8% of the sample, followed by 30.1% and 27.3%; finally, those most involved in recreational nightlife activity accounted for 21.8%. There were no significant differences between males and females in the different categories.

As regards substance use (Table 1), alcohol is the substance most widely consumed (more than 90% had consumed it in the previous year), whilst the abuse of alcohol (drunkenness in the previous month) was reported by 80.5% of the sample. We created four categories of young people in relation to drug use: those who did not use them or had simply experimented with them at some time; ex-users; occasional users (which for cannabis includes those who use it once a week or less, and for cocaine who use it 1-3 times per month or less); and frequent users (2-4 days a week or more for cannabis; once week or more for cocaine or ecstasy). With these categories in mind, as far as illegal drugs are concerned we find that adding occasional consumers and frequent consumers, 65.9% are cannabis users, 27.1% are cocaine users and 13.4% are ecstasy users. There are statistically significant differences by gender in all the substances and in drunkenness episodes, that is, there are fewer women users among both the occasional and the frequent consumers. We also find statistically significant differences on correlating use

with greater involvement in recreational nightlife activity.

Negative consequences of drug use

Many young people are aware that the use of drugs can have negative consequences. In our sample, 62.3% of the participants thought that being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs affects them insofar as they fail to take measures against sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs) or pregnancy. There are gender differences, since 67% of the women expressed agreement with this view, compared to 57.1% of the men ($\chi^2 = 4.50$, $p < .05$), whilst age (18 and under or 19 and over) has no

Table 1
Typology of consumers of cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy, drunkenness episodes in the last month and polyconsumption by gender and involvement in recreational nightlife activity

	Never + experimental use	Ex-users	Occasional ¹	Frequent ²
Cannabis use	23.4%	9.3%	20.7%	45.2%
Gender** (p= 0.005)				
Men	35.9%	34.1%	53.8%	53.8%
Women	64.1%	65.9%	46.2%	46.2%
Involvement in nightlife*** (p= 0.000)				
1 less	40.8%	22.5%	18.0%	11.9%
2	34.0%	32.5%	31.5%	27.3%
3	19.4%	30.0%	23.6%	32.5%
4 more	5.8%	15.0%	27.0%	28.4%
Cocaine use	57.3%	6.4%	18.0%	9.1%
Gender*** (p= 0.000)				
Men	41.3%	53.6%	58.2%	75.0%
Women	58.7%	46.4%	41.8%	25.0%
Involvement in nightlife*** (p= 0.000)				
1 less	29.4%	14.3%	7.7%	5.1%
2	33.1%	39.3%	26.9%	20.5%
3	21.4%	32.1%	34.6%	35.9%
4 more	16.1%	14.3%	30.8%	38.5%
Ecstasy use	66.8%	5.9%	11.4%	2.0%
Gender (p= 0.084)				
Men	43.5%	61.5%	56.0%	66.7%
Women	56.5%	38.5%	44.0%	33.3%
Involvement in nightlife** (p= 0.003)				
1 less	25.9%	15.4%	8.5%	.0%
2	32.4%	34.6%	25.5%	22.2%
3	21.0%	30.8%	44.7%	66.7%
4 more	20.7%	19.2%	21.3%	11.1%
Drunkenness episodes last month	None 19.3%	One 16.1%	Two 18.9%	>2 44.5%
Gender** (p= 0.000)				
Men	29.4%	40.8%	61.4%	53.1%
Women	70.6%	59.2%	38.6%	46.9%
Involvement in nightlife*** (p= 0.000)				
1 less	47.6%	34.3%	19.8%	5.2%
2	33.3%	35.7%	37.0%	24.5%
3	13.1%	18.6%	33.3%	33.3%
4 more	6.0%	11.4%	9.9%	37.0%

¹ Occasional use for cannabis includes those who use it once a week or less. For cocaine or ecstasy it included those who use it 1-3 times per month or less.

² Frequent use for cannabis means 2-4 days a week or more, and for cocaine or ecstasy, once a week or more.

influence in this regard. In addition to being aware of the risks, the young people have experienced problems that they acknowledge to be the consequence of having consumed alcohol or drugs; it should be mentioned that of 13 problems, only in four cases were there significant differences between men and women (having had arguments, having had fights, problems with the police and road accidents), all of them cases involving behaviours related to aggressiveness or the way of driving cars. There were no differences for problems related to sexual behaviour (regretting having had sexual relations under the influence of drugs or alcohol) or other aspects (money problems, partner abuse, illness, problems with the family, etc.).

Use of condoms and other risk behaviours

As regards use of condoms, the last time they had sexual relations only 55% used one, the figure for men's use (61.7%) being significantly higher ($\chi^2 = 7.43$, $p = 0.004$) than that for women (48.6%). In terms of age, there were no differences in the use of condoms between under-18s and over-18s. The data here is key, since it suggests a weaker preventive attitude in women.

Among the reasons given for not using condoms (Table 3), the most widely mentioned (68.7%) is having a stable partner or a partner one trusts; there were no significant differences by gender, but differences were found by age. With regard to the question of stability, it should be noted, however, that 45.1% had had sexual relations with three or more partners in the previous year, and 35.3% had had two partners (no significant differences by gender). Of the rest, 9.8% had not had sexual relations in the past year, while the other 9.8% had had relations with just one person.

The second most widely cited reason for not using a condom is not having one to hand at the time (48%), with significant differences by sex (55.8% M, 40.9% W). Other reasons given are excess of enthusiasm, with 38.9, simply deciding not to use one, with 37.1%, having forgotten it (29.1%), being too drunk or drugged up, "too far gone" (26.5%), or being uncomfortable about asking (13.1%). In nearly all cases (except for having a trustworthy partner or having forgotten it) there are statistically significant differences by sex, with men citing each reason more than women. By age there are statistically significant differences in not using a condom only when the reason is having a stable/trusted partner or excess of enthusiasm, the older participants being those who mention these reasons more.

On examining the data it can be seen that having a stable partner (the most frequently mentioned reason and with no differences by sex) does not remove risk from the sexual relation, since 80% have had relations with two or more persons in the past year. However (Table 4), 68.7% did not always use condoms in their sexual relations in the past year; 49.5% have not always controlled the possibility of pregnancy. But moreover, in relation to the use of alcohol, the vast majority (76.6%) have had sexual relations under its effects, on at least one occasion, and 55.2% under the effects of some illegal drug. In sum, a substantial percentage of the population studied have performed risky sexual behaviour over the last year. We found no statistically significant differences between men and women, in either the use of condoms ($p = 0.065$) or the use of contraceptive methods ($p = 0.675$), though we did find differences insofar as men were more likely to have sex under the effects of alcohol ($p = 0.005$) and of drugs (0.000).

There are other behaviours related to sexuality that also indicate risk behaviours. It is noteworthy, first of all, that 7.3% report having paid to have sex, with significant differences between men (14.3%) and women (only 0.9%), or having been paid to have sex, once again with significant differences between the two sexes (6.7% men, 0.4% women). However, there are no differences as far as having had an STD test is concerned (14.3% of the sample), nor in having exchanged sex for drugs (2.5%). On the other hand, it is notable that in our sample the younger participants have at some time been paid for accepting sexual relations significantly more than the older ones ($\chi^2 = 5.11$, $p < .05$; 7.1% in those aged 14-15 and 2.4% in those aged 19-25).

Table 2
Problems resulting from the use of alcohol or drugs
in the past 12 months

	Total	Men	Women	χ^2
I have had arguments	28.9%	33.2%	24.9%	3.61*
I have been short of money or in debt	24.7%	27.8%	21.8%	2.09
I have hurt myself (in some sort of accident)	24.1%	26.8%	22.5%	1.10
Problems with my parents (or other close family members)	19.1%	20.9%	17.4%	0.83
Problems with friends (or partner)	18.6%	22.0%	15.6%	2.89
I have had sexual relations which I later regretted	17.5%	17.6%	17.4%	0.00
Problems with the police	14.5%	19.7%	9.8%	8.38**
I have got into fights	14.2%	19.0%	9.8%	7.53**
I have been ill	11.2%	10.7%	11.6%	0.07
Problems at work/school/university	10.5%	12.2%	8.9%	1.21
Road accident(s)	5.3%	8.3%	2.7%	6.70**
I have been abused by my partner	3.7%	3.9%	3.6%	0.03
I have abused my partner	2.1%	1.5%	2.7%	0.75

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Sexual orientation and risk behaviours

In our sample there is a majority of young people who consider themselves heterosexuals (90.4%) and 8.4% who define themselves as bisexuals or homosexuals. The heterosexuals were more likely to use a condom (53.1%) in their most recent sexual relation, whilst among the homosexuals the rate of use was 40%, and among the bisexuals, 36.4% – though these differences are not significant. The heterosexuals have been less promiscuous (mean of 2.9 sexual partners in the past year, compared to 5.1 in the homosexuals and 4 in the bisexuals), and have made less use of the practice of exchanging sex for drugs (1.3%, as compared to 13% of homosexuals and 9% of bisexuals).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study relates the use of alcohol and other drugs with risky sexual behaviour by young people in the recreational nightlife context. It has its limitations in that, on confining the scope of its recruitment to those involved in this recreational context, the findings cannot be generalized to all Spanish young people. Moreover, the study analyzes complex and intimate aspects using a purely quantitative methodology, and this approach is restrictive for describing specific events whose meanings the data themselves cannot provide us with.

Among the data we should highlight and reflect upon is the finding that the women participants consume less alcohol and drugs, but in spite of this appear prone to the risks derived from their use in the same proportion as the men. For example, there are no statistically significant differences between sexes among those who regret having had sexual relations under the effects of alcohol or drugs; or those who do not always use a condom; or those who cite as a reason for not wearing a condom that the partner is stable (when we can see that 80% have had two or more sexual partners in the last year). Where significant differences do emerge between the sexes is in relation to aggressive behaviours, with men more prone to this (though abuse within the couple, as a result of having used drugs or alcohol, is similar for men and women).

Greater frequency and intensity of recreational nightlife activity favours the use and abuse of alcohol and other drugs, as was found in other studies (Calafat et al., 2003). Greater involvement in this leisure model is also more likely to favour sexual relations under the effects of alcohol and drugs.

There are issues that need further exploration. Research has shown that substance use is more favourable the lower the perception of risk (Moral, Rodríguez, & Sirvent, 2006). In the present study the

majority of the young people interviewed (62.3%) are aware that having sexual relations under the effects of alcohol or drugs can have a negative influence on their control over their sexual behaviour, but many of them practice risk behaviours. What other protective factors should be promoted, apart from providing information?

On correlating the use of drugs with the use of preventive methods (condom), we can see a negative influence, but if we relate it to degree of involvement in nightlife activity we do not find statistically significant differences in the control exercised. These aspects also need more exploration, since in this same study it emerges that greater investment of time in the nightlife context means greater use of drugs and more drunkenness. In other studies focusing on participation in holiday recreational contexts, the researchers did indeed find higher levels of both risky sexual behaviour and alcohol/drug use (Bellis, Hughes, Dillon, Copeland, & Gates, 2007), though the data in that context are not always so conclusive (Elliot et al., 1998).

The question of gender merits special attention in view of its complexity and of the need for both analytical and preventive action (Barberá & Cala, 2008). Despite the fact that there is awareness of the risks of having sexual relations without control, and that the use of drugs facilitates such risks, half of the young people in our sample did not use condoms in their most recent sexual encounter; and among those who failed to use them there is a higher proportion of women. That is, there is greater awareness of the dangers among the women, but this does not translate into actual preventive actions. There is controversy over the question of gender differences in relation to risk behaviours. Some authors (Measham, 2002) argue that when women seek to get drunk they do so ‘controlling the loss of control’. In a Danish study (Østergaard, 2007) with 1,445 adolescents who were asked about the role of alcohol at a party, the two sexes coincided in the view that alcohol is key to creating the right atmosphere. But while for men drinking to excess

Table 3
Reasons for having sex without condom (N= 440)

	TOTAL	Gender		χ^2	Age		χ^2
		Men	Women		<18	19-25	
Stable/Trusted partner	68.9%	68.4%	68.9%	0.00	50.9%	74.8%	10.59***
None to hand at the time	48.1%	55.8%	40.9%	4.72*	42.1%	50.3%	1.12
Excess of enthusiasm	38.9%	45.6%	32.0%	3.64*	20.4%	45.6%	9.60***
Decided not to use	37.1%	44.2%	30.5%	3.40*	31.3%	39.3%	0.96
Forgot it	29.1%	35.8%	24.1%	2.45	30.4%	28.4%	0.06
“Too far gone”	26.5%	34.6%	19.3%	4.96*	17.4%	29.7%	2.57
Uncomfortable about asking	13.1%	19.7%	7.4%	4.88*	16.7%	11.7%	0.65

* p<.05; ** p<.01. *** p<.001

(vomiting, etc.) makes the party more fun, this is not the case for women. In our Spanish sample there appears to be a contradiction between what people think and what they do; there seems to be greater awareness of the risks on the part of women, but in practice, surprisingly, they descend to the same levels of precaution as males.

The most widely mentioned reason (68.7%) for not using a condom is having a stable or trusted partner, though it turns out that 80% have had an average of two or more partners per year. Focusing on the influence of alcohol and drugs, around a quarter of our sample (26.5%) have failed to use a condom due to being “too far gone”, this being reported more often by the men. But once again we find no differences between the sexes among those (14.3% of the sample) who have had a test to rule out having caught an STD.

In sum, a substantial percentage of the population studied have performed risk behaviours over the past year. And despite the fact that women consume less and are more aware of the potential problems, we do not find differences between the sexes in the use of condoms, in the adoption of contraceptive measures or in having had sex which one later regrets; on the other hand, we do find a difference insofar as men are more likely to have sex under the influence of alcohol and drugs.

These data appear to suggest that within the context of ‘convergence’ in which we can interpret the changes in women’s roles in pursuit of gender equality, women may in fact be subject to more negative consequences. Perhaps the current situation in which gender identity is generated, especially in recreational contexts, brings with it difficulties for some women to exercise greater capacity for the management of risk. Some interpretations see the convergence process as positive, underestimating and rendering invisible new forms of subordination (such as drug use). On other occasions, this process of convergence sees the devaluation of feminine values in view of their association with traditional feminine stereotypes, such as the greater capacity for protection and self-protection that has been

promoted in women. Moreover, the activity of many young people is framed within a model of ‘instant’ and consumerist sexuality, an excellent account of which can be found in Bauman (2005). Therefore, the data presented here, in spite of their limitations, suggest a need to reappraise the indicators with which the current model of ‘equality’ in gender relations is managed.

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Table 4
Risk behaviours related to sexual activity in last 12 months by gender

	Total	Gender		p
		Men	Women	
Always without condom use	68.7%	71.9%	65.6%	(p= 0.065)
Without contraceptive use	49.5%	50.6%	48.5%	(p= 0.675)
Under influence alcohol	76.6%	83.3%	70.4%	(p= 0.005)**
Under influence drugs	55.2%	63.4%	47.8%	(p= 0.000)***
** p>.01. *** p<.001				

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