



Researchers investigating female attitudes to sex and their sexuality were surprised to find that most women have rather more traditional, conservative views on one-night stands than they expected.

Women expressed concerns about casual sex

Around nine out of 10 of those questioned felt casual sex was immoral and that those women who engaged in it were not doing so primarily for pleasure.

They said they felt sorry for women who had one-night stands, that they were lacking something in their lives and if they had not simply lost control through drink and drugs they were seeking emotional rather than physical connection.

Dr Sharron Hinchcliffe, a psychologist from the University of Sheffield, presented her findings at the annual conference of the British Psychological Society in Cardiff yesterday.

Dr Hinchcliffe said: "Our results did not fit in with the image we have of today's independent woman who can go out and get sexual fulfillment without the ties of a relationship."

"There was a view that if women had one-night stands they were doing it for reasons other than their own pleasure, more out of a feeling of being desperate, needy or looking for something, or that they had lost control through drink or drugs."

"They said they did it for reasons that were different to those of women in relationships - which they said were for pleasure and to express their love for their partner. They defined it as deviant behaviour."

"They referred to the women as emulating male behaviour. It was certainly the view that it was not the way women should behave."

"Some of the respondents said these things even though they admitted they had had one-night stands themselves. I was surprised at how judgmental they were."

"It makes me question whether women have really gained all the sexual freedom they are supposed to have gained since the Sixties."

Dr Hinchcliffe and colleagues carried out in-depth interviews with 46 women selected from the electoral roll aged 23 to 83, with an average age of 48.

Around 10 per cent of the sample disagreed with the majority view of "no strings" sex as immoral. Dr Hinchcliffe said that if anything the women in their early thirties were more negative about one-night stands than those of women in their fifties.

Some of the participants also expressed concerns about women having casual sex exposing themselves to sexually transmitted disease.

A survey of 1,095 men and women carried out on behalf of Amnesty International UK and published in November found that more than a third of people believed a female rape victim was totally or partially responsible if she had behaved in a flirtatious manner with her attacker.

Dr Tuppy Owens, of the Sexual Freedom Coalition, a group that campaigns for sexual freedom between consenting adults, said: "I don't like the expression 'one-night stand'."

"Two people just banging away at each other can be pretty meaningless and an empty experience, unless there is some passion, care and feeling towards the other person. However, if you go out wondering what might happen, ready to give as well as receive, you might have the most wonderful adventure."

"Perhaps if they had asked the questions in a different way they would have got different answers."

Norman Wells, the director of Family and Youth Concern, said: "It shows that most women are seeking more than the fleeting gratification that temporary sexual relationships can offer."

"Sexual intimacy was never meant to be engaged in outside the context of lifelong union between one man and one woman."

"By divorcing sex from marriage in our thinking and in the sexual education given to children and young people, we are promoting something that runs contrary to our basic longings for stability, permanence and commitment."