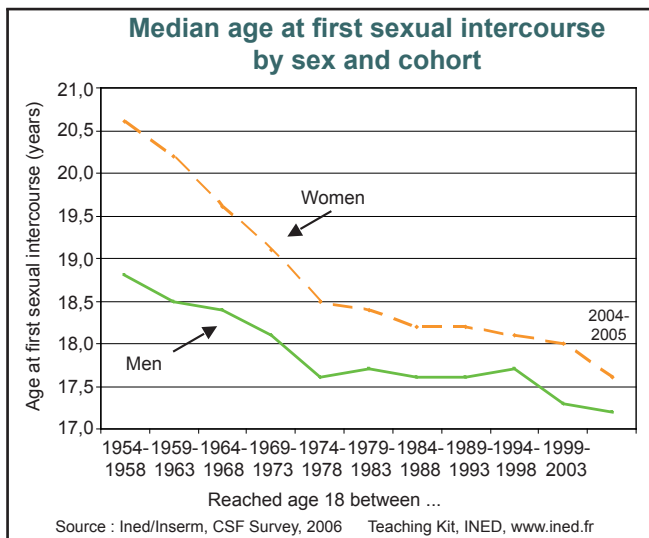


Age at first sexual intercourse in France

A narrower gap between the sexes

Fifty years ago, the median age at first sexual intercourse for women, i.e. the age at which half of all women had experienced their sexual debut, was 20.6 on average, two years later than for men. In the 1960s and 70s, women's age at first intercourse fell sharply, becoming much closer to that of men, before levelling off in the 1980s and 90s. Since 2000, the gap has narrowed to just a few months, with a median age of 17.6 for women and of 17.2 for men.



The influence of more prolonged schooling

The changes in the 1960s and 70s reflect the progressive dissociation between sexual debut and conjugal life. For women in particular, the first sexual partner is very rarely the first spouse. The fact that age at sexual debut remained stable in the 1980s and 90s is probably the consequence of longer schooling, which delayed emancipation in France and across Europe.

The widespread development of modern contraception in the 1970s and the emergence of AIDS in the mid 1980s had no effect on the timing of first sexual intercourse.

Men and women see things differently

First sexual intercourse still means something very different for men and for women. Men see it as a personal milestone and do not necessarily associate the act with the start of a romantic relationship. They rarely claim to be in love with their first partner who, in a large proportion of cases, is an older woman. For women, on the contrary, it is a sign of emotional commitment. The first partner is always older than her, as is her first spouse.

The CSF Survey

The CSF survey on sexuality in France was organized by INED and INSERM on the initiative of the Agence nationale de recherche sur le sida (ANRS) and headed by Nathalie Bajos (INSERM) and Michel Bozon (INED). It was coordinated by Nathalie Beltzer (Observatoire regional de la santé en Île de France). Conducted in 2006, it is the third major national survey on sexuality, following the Simon survey (1970) and the ACSF survey (1992). It covered a random sample of 12,364 people aged 18-69 who were interviewed by telephone. The acceptance rate was 75%.

To find out more (www.ined.fr) :

[At what age do women and men have their first sexual intercourse ?](#) (M. Bozon, *Population & Societies*, 391, June 2003).

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