

WOMEN'S HEALTH NEWS

More than half of young people use 'choking' during sex, not realising the serious health effects

by [Brianna Boecker](#) | 1 day ago



More than half of young people are using strangulation during sex, with many of them unaware of potentially serious health consequences.

A study of 4,702 young people aged from 18 to 35 years old found that 57 per cent had been strangled during sex at least once, and 51 per cent had strangled a partner at least once.

Strangulation that causes serious harm is a criminal offence across Australia.

Most of the people surveyed by Melbourne researchers didn't know that even consensual strangulation— often referred to as 'choking'— can be seriously harmful. And few of them knew that it was a criminal offence in their State or Territory.

The study, by researchers from Melbourne University Law School and The University of Queensland, has been published in the *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

Findings show that for 31 per cent of respondents, the first person to strangle them was a partner, and for 30 per cent, the first person they ever strangled was a partner. This occurred usually between the ages of 19–21.

On average, people reported they had been strangled 5 times, by 3 partners. And across the sample, only 6.3 per cent reported both being strangled by, and strangling, a partner.

More men (59 per cent) than women (40 per cent) reported being the person that strangled their partner.

More women (61 per cent) than men (43 per cent) reported ever being strangled.

Nearly three-quarters (74 per cent) of trans and gender-diverse participants reported that they had strangled their partners. And a high proportion of people who identified as trans or gender-diverse (78 per cent) reported ever being strangled.

Study co-author Professor Heather Douglas, from Melbourne University Law School, said many young Australians are consenting to strangulation during sex without realising the serious injuries that can come from it.

“Choking a person during sex can cause brain injury, even when the person remains conscious. The more often people are strangled, the more likely they are to experience brain injury – including memory loss and difficulties problem-solving – and the worse the brain injury will become,” said Professor Douglas.



“It doesn’t matter if there are no apparent injuries, or whether the person consented.”

“Brain injury can also be incremental – getting a bit worse with each choking – and the person may not know they have suffered a brain injury. The effects of repeated strangling are insidious and build over time, like the effects of repeated concussions on footballers.”

She says other injuries can include bruising, sore throat, neck pain, a hoarse voice, a cough, difficulty swallowing, swollen lips, nausea and vomiting.

More serious impacts can include miscarriage of pregnancy, or even death– both of which can occur weeks or months after the initial strangulation.

Research estimates that people can be rendered unconscious in around 10 seconds, they can have a fit from lack of oxygen in around 17 seconds, they can have a loss of bowel control in around 30 seconds and they can die in around 150 seconds.

Professor Douglas says people cannot always rely on having a “safe word” or “safe gesture”, as being choked can prevent a person from indicating that they want it to stop.

“Earlier US research found that many people respond to being strangled by freezing, a common trauma response, leaving them unable to move or speak. This means the person being strangled might not be able to use a pre-agreed ‘safe word’ or ‘safe gesture’, even if they want it to stop.”

Researchers are recommending improved community education about the physical risks of sexual strangulation and about the importance of fully informed consent.

Some good resources for more information on strangulation include Women’s Health NSW’s free, public platform, called [‘It Left No Marks’](#), as well as the [‘Breathless’ strangulation education campaign](#), which carries the key message that there is no safe way to strangle someone.

If you or someone you know is experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, domestic, family or sexual violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732, text 0458 737 732 or visit 1800RESPECT.org.au for online chat and video call services.

If you are concerned about your behaviour or use of violence, you can contact the Men’s Referral Service on 1300 766 491 or visit <http://www.ntv.org.au>.

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