

# How long does it take to make an appointment at a sexual health clinic in the UK?

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## Abstract

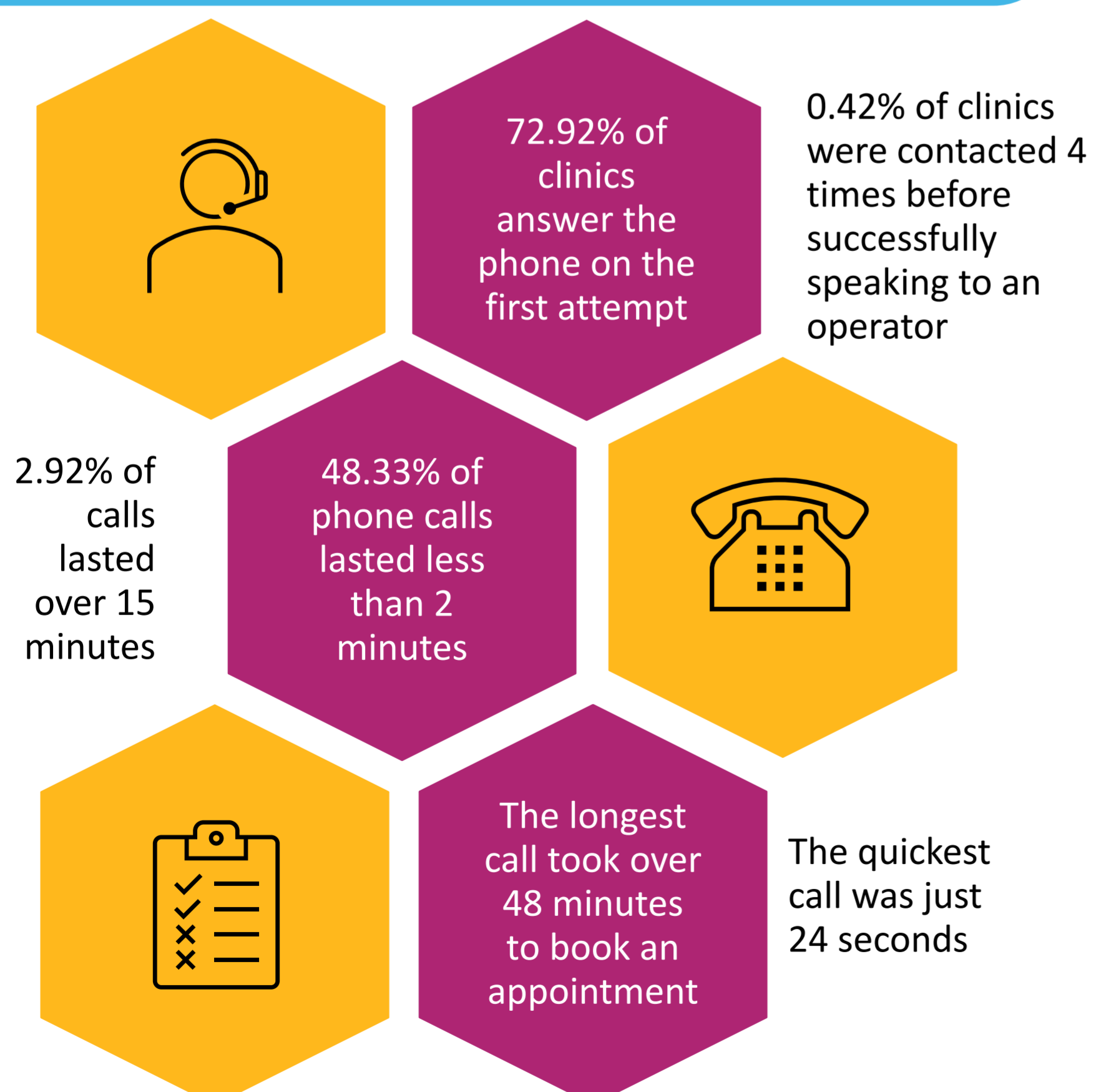
In recent years there have been significant changes to the structure and management of sexual health services (SHS). With the loss of the managed 48-hour wait target, demand being at an all-time high, and funding simultaneously being cut, access is thought to have suffered. This study aims to investigate what the general state of telephone access is across the UK and if there are significant differences in access to sexual health services between the different regions.

## Methods

During October and November 2019, 242 sexual health clinics identified by the BASHH website (and which were open more than once a week) were called during clinic opening times, by three different mystery shoppers. Two posed as symptomatic patients and one as an asymptomatic contact – with all three requesting to be seen as soon as possible

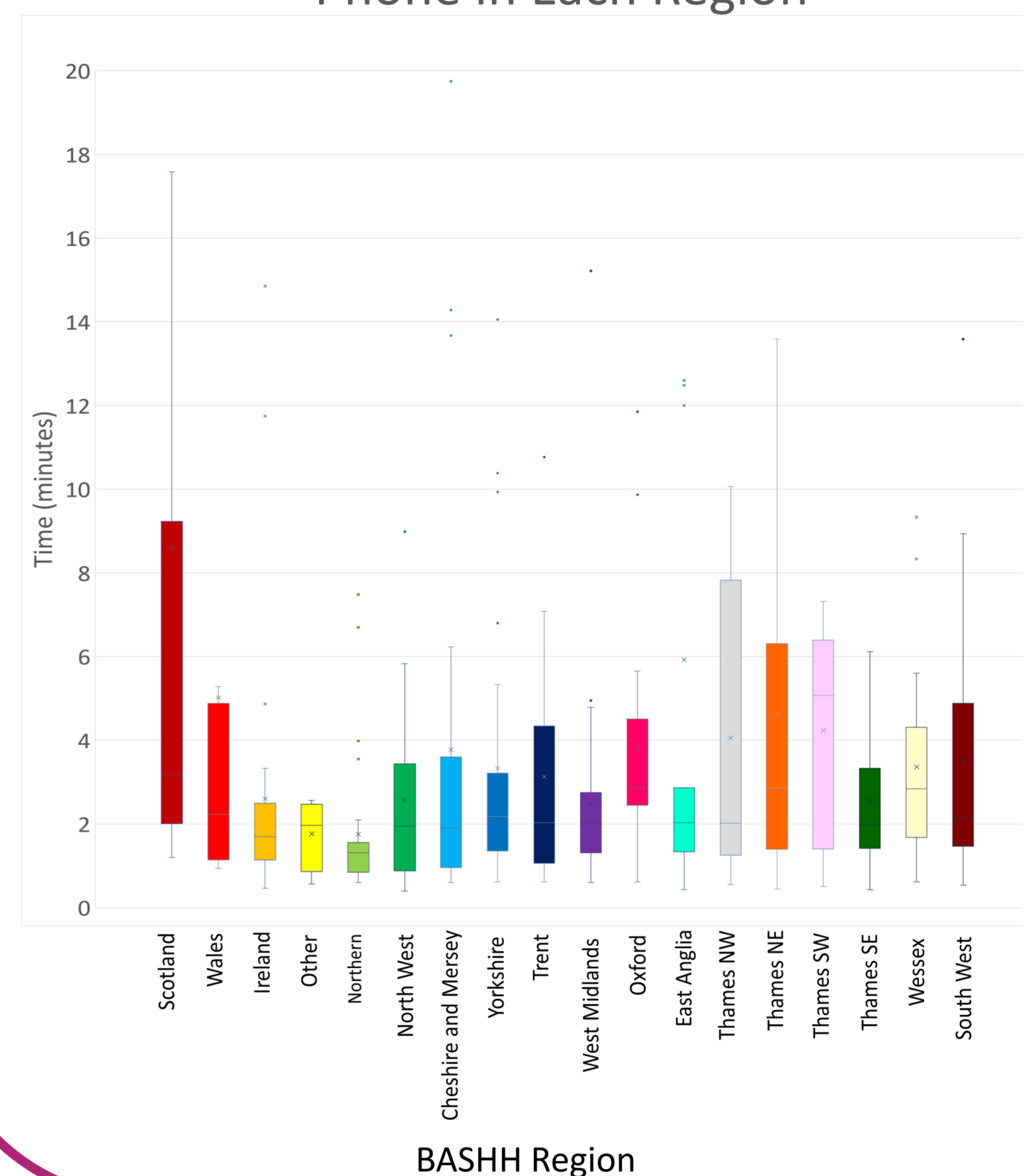
Using the NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) standard of being seen within 2 working days if contacting a clinic about an STI as a marker of access. The results yielded were coded and the information was analysed using SPSS v24.

- A clinic is judged as having good telephone access if patients can book an appointment in under two minutes without being put on hold.
- It is imperative that patients can quickly and easily access sexual health services and book appointments without having to disrupt work or school which are two considerable barriers to seeking help.



## Results

A Graph to Show the Length of Time it Takes to Book a Sexual Health Appointment Over the Phone in Each Region



- Overall, 91.66% (659/719) of the phone calls resulted in an appointment being given within 48 hours
  - There are great differences in the time it takes to book an appointment depending on the region in which you live
- The clinics in the Northern BASHH region have the highest telephone access with 75% of calls being answered and an appointment being made in under two minutes
- For the asymptomatic patient, 80.83% of calls were answered without the patient being put on hold
- 9.17% of the time, clinics referred the patient to book an appointment online

## Conclusion

The level of telephone access is good, however there is wide variation across the different clinics and improvements are needed to reduce time on hold and take an increased volume of calls in order for patients to not have to call the clinic multiple times for one appointment. Work is needed to ensure that the population can access sexual health services quickly and easily, independent of where they live or where their closest clinic is.