



Data insights

Female students' views on their wellbeing

A key finding in the inaugural Speaking Out Survey conducted with 4,912 WA students in 2019 was that female students rated their wellbeing less favourably than males. The following data provides further analysis of this significant result.

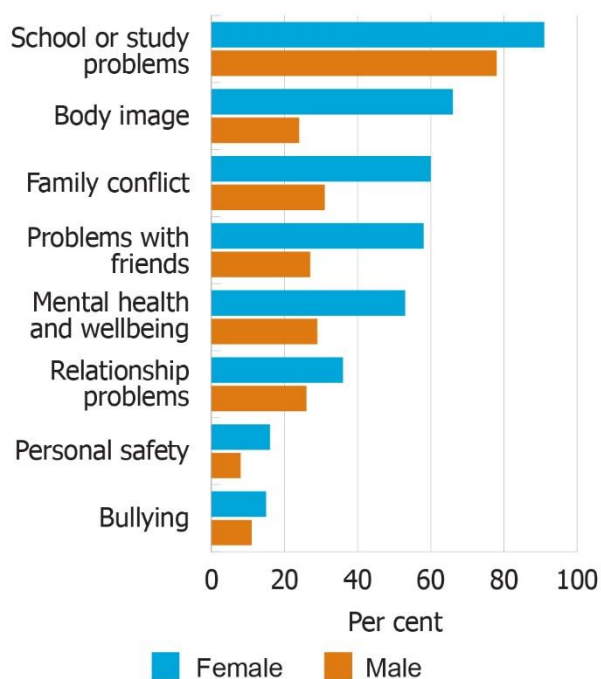
Mental health

Female high school students reported higher rates of depression, and lower scores on resilience, happiness, life satisfaction and self-perception, compared to their male counterparts.

Stress and depression

Female students in Years 9 to 12 were more likely to report stress from any sources in the last 12 months compared to male students.

Figure 1: Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students reporting sources of stress in the last year, by gender

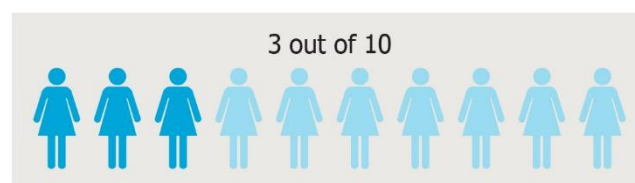


More female than male students reported low life satisfaction (17% vs 11%) and feeling sad, blue or depressed for more than two weeks in the last year (70% vs 50%). They were also twice as likely to report not feeling happy with themselves (38% vs 17%), not able to achieve their goals (14% vs 7%) or deal with things that happen in their life (12% vs 5%).

Body image and diet

Female students in high school were more likely to perceive themselves as overweight than male students (35% vs 23%), and were happiest if they considered themselves to be very underweight. Compared to male students, they were also more likely to worry about their weight, worry how they look, and skip meals.

Figure 2: Proportion of female Year 7 to Year 12 students worrying a lot about their weight



Note: Three out of ten (29.9%) female students reported worrying 'a lot' about their weight.

Protective and risk factors

Female students have shown to be more vulnerable than male students in regard to aspects of emotional and physical safety, as well as supportive relationships and connection with others.

Knowledge and access to support

About twice as many female high school students reported they were unable to see someone for health support when required in the

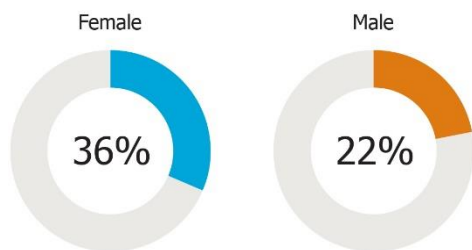


last 12 months, compared to male students (35% vs 18%). About 40 per cent of female students said they had accessed mental health support and resources in the last 12 months, despite the majority of female students (70%) reporting prolonged sadness or depression in that time.

Supportive relationships

Supportive relationships with parents and whether one's family gets along had the strongest association with mental health for female students. In particular, female students who were able to talk to their parents (particularly fathers) about problems and said that their families get along well reported substantially higher happiness and resilience, and fewer reports of prolonged sadness or depression or stress.

Figure 3: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting they cannot talk to their parents about their problems, by gender



Female students feeling teachers listen and care for them was also associated with higher happiness scores.

The desire for female students to stay connected was reflected in their reported feelings of being bothered when not having access to online modes of communicating with friends. A greater proportion of female than male high school students reported going without eating or sleeping very often or fairly often because of mobile phone use (18% female vs 11% male).

Female students generally reported not being as good at making and keeping friends and did not feel they had enough friends, compared to male students. Being good at making and keeping friends was associated with higher happiness and resilience scores.

Female high school students also reported a stronger association between feeling happy with themselves and how their family gets along.

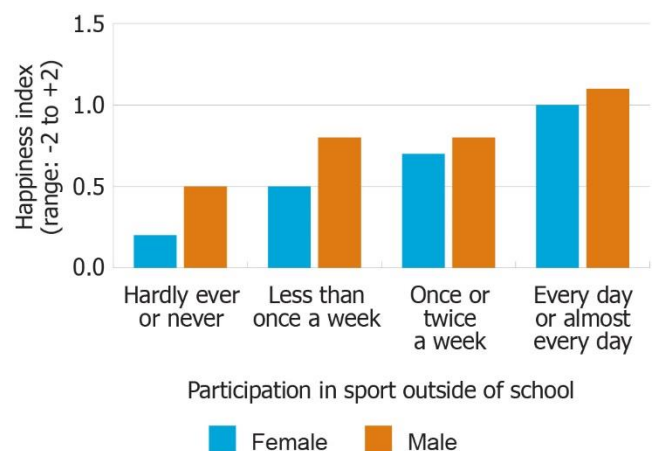
Keeping fit and active

There were no gender differences in attitudes towards being physically active for students in primary school but female sentiment to fitness and participation in sport outside of school declined in high school. Less than one-half (46%) of female students cared very much about being physically active compared to 56 per cent of male students.

In addition, a high proportion (40%) of female high school students participated in sport outside of school less than once a week or hardly ever or never (compared to 29% of male students).

This is notable because students who participated in sport outside of school reported higher resilience, especially with respect to achieving life goals.

Figure 4: Level of resilience in Year 7 to Year 12 students by level of participation in sport outside of school, by gender



Note: Percentage reflects the proportion of students who reported it was 'a little true' or 'not at all true' they could talk to parents about their problems.

Safety

Fewer female students felt safe in their home, school, the community or public transport compared to males. Not feeling safe in these environments was associated with lower resilience, happiness and wellbeing.

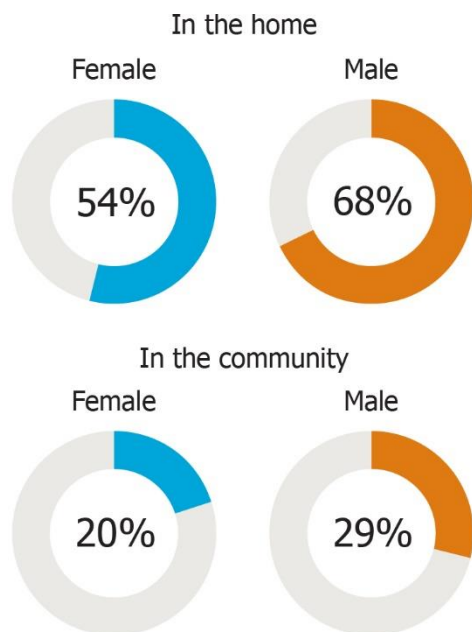
Students not feeling safe in the home was associated with additional negative outcomes,



with female students reporting higher rates of prolonged sadness and depression and staying away from home.

More than one-third (36%) of female students have stayed away from home overnight due to problems compared to 24 per cent of male students. Twice as many female students reported staying away from home more than once.

Figure 5: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting they feel safe all the time, by gender and location

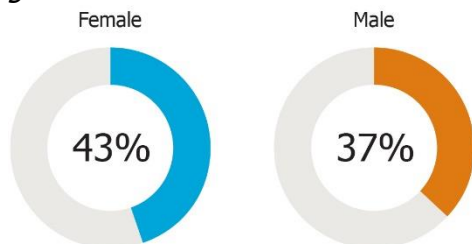


Note: Percentage reflects the proportion of students who reported feeling safe 'all the time', compared to 'most of the time', 'sometimes', 'a little bit' or 'never'.

Bullying and harm

Female students in high school are more likely to experience bullying and cyberbullying, compared to their male class mates.

Figure 6: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting experiences of bullying, by gender



Note: Percentage reflects the proportion of students who reported cyberbullying, bullying or both.

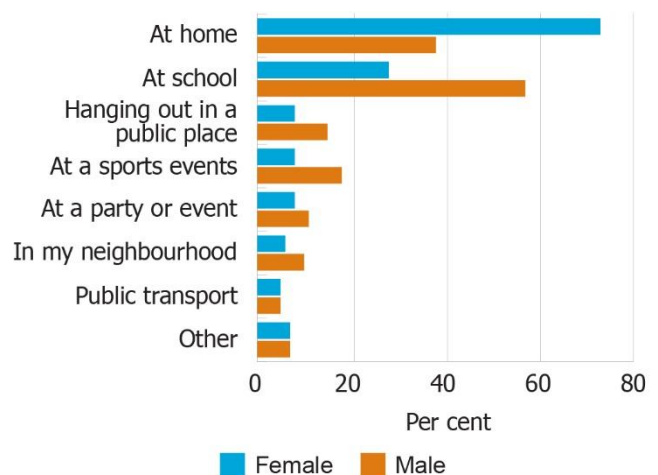
The difference is due to female students reporting more experiences of cyberbullying than male students (21% vs 12%). Experiences of bullying and cyberbullying were related to decreased happiness, prolonged periods of sadness/depression and school absences, especially in female students.

School absences due to being afraid of bullying were twice as prevalent (and more frequent) among female high school students compared to male students (21% vs 11%).

Year 9 to Year 12 students were also asked about being hit or physically harmed. Being hit or physically harmed was significantly associated with lower happiness scores, particularly for female students. Female students who have been physically harmed were twice as likely to disagree about being happy with themselves (59%) compared to those who have not been harmed (30%).

The location where this occurred is significantly different between genders. Male students are most likely to be physically harmed at school, while female students are most likely to be physically harmed at home.

Figure 7: Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students reporting locations where they have been hit or physically harmed by someone on purpose, by gender



Note: Percentage reflects the proportion of students who reported they worry a 'lot' or 'somewhat' about each aspect: somebody hurting themselves; somebody moving away and somebody fighting.



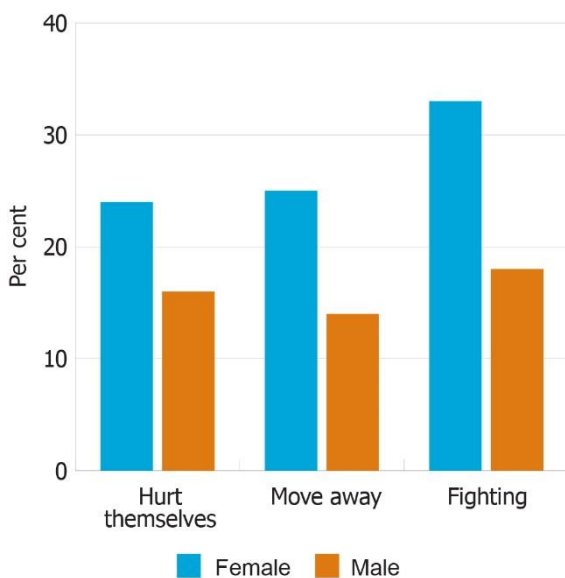
Family worry

A greater proportion of female students tended to worry that someone in their home or family will be fighting, hurt themselves or move away compared to male students. This was related to decreased life satisfaction and feeling less safe at home.

Worry about family fighting was also associated with increased stress and decreased happiness and resilience, highlighting family conflict as particularly impactful.

The associations between family worry and mental health were stronger in female students compared to their male class mates.

Figure 8: Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting worry about family and life in their home



Note: Percentage reflects the proportion of students who reported they worry a 'lot' or 'somewhat' about each aspect: somebody hurting themselves; somebody moving away and somebody fighting.

Engagement in learning

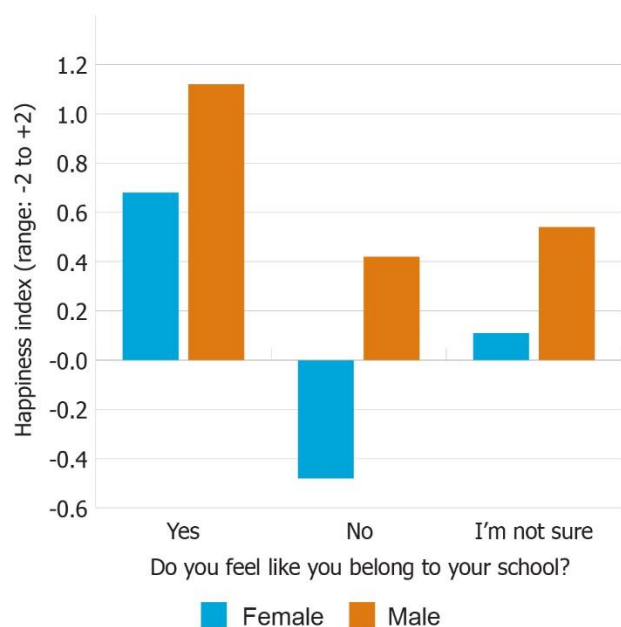
Fewer female students in high school consider attending school to be 'very important' compared to male class mates.

In high school, female students generally did not like school as much as male students, with 25 per cent stating they did not like school much or at all, compared to 18 per cent of male students.

Substantially more male high school students reported a sense of belonging at their school compared to female students. Only about one-half (53%) of female students in high school feel like they belong at their school. In contrast, 67 per cent of male students felt like they belonged at their school.

A sense of belonging at school was significantly associated with students feeling happy about themselves. In particular, female students who do not feel like they belong at school were more likely than male students to respond that they do not feel happy with themselves.

Figure 9: Level of happiness of Year 7 to Year 12 students by level of reported belonging at school, by gender



The full Speaking Out Survey report and Indicators of Wellbeing data are available at ccyp.wa.gov.au

