



Data insights

Aboriginal students' views on their wellbeing

A key finding in the inaugural Speaking Out Survey conducted with 4,912 WA students in 2019 was that while Aboriginal students fared less well than non-Aboriginal students in terms of material needs, family stability and expectations for further education, they reported high self-esteem and sense of belonging.

The following data provides further analysis of the responses from the 957 Aboriginal students who took part in the survey.

Physical health

Healthy behaviours

Aboriginal students were more likely to participate in sporting activities outside of school compared to non-Aboriginal students. Participation in sport was associated with resilience and greater life satisfaction.

Non-Aboriginal students were less likely to have family members and friends who smoke cigarettes compared to Aboriginal students (family members who smoke: 24% vs 44%).

Having a family member who smokes at least once a day was associated with Aboriginal students smoking more frequently as well as being younger when they first smoked a cigarette.

Among students who have drunk alcohol in the last four weeks, Aboriginal students were more likely to have engaged in risky drinking (5+ drinks <4 hours) compared to non-Aboriginal students (10% vs 2%).

More than twice as many Aboriginal students reported not brushing their teeth in a day compared to non-Aboriginal students (13% vs

5%). This increased for Aboriginal students in regional (15%) and remote (18%) areas.

Many Aboriginal students slept fewer hours than is recommended for their age¹ (primary school: 40% <9 hours, high school: 20% <8 hours).

Mental health

Positive self-image

Aboriginal female students generally have a more positive self-image compared to non-Aboriginal female students. They do not worry as much about their weight or how they look and are more likely to feel good and happy about themselves.

Twice as many Aboriginal female students report not caring about how they look (12% vs 6%), and a higher proportion reported they do not worry at all about their weight (28% vs 16%), compared to non-Aboriginal female students.

A higher proportion of Aboriginal female students were confident in their abilities (30%) and strongly agreed with feeling good about (40%) and happy with (40%) themselves compared to non-Aboriginal female students (23%, 28% and 27% respectively).



Figure 1: Positive self-image of female Year 4 to Year 12 students, by Aboriginal status



Note: Percentage reflects the proportion of students who strongly agreed with the statements 'I feel good about myself' or 'I am able to do things as well as most other people'.

Happiness and life satisfaction

The majority of Aboriginal high school students report high life satisfaction (59%), that they can achieve their goals even if it is hard (68%) and can deal with things that happen in their life (71%).

About 59 per cent of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Year 9 to 12 students reported feeling sad, blue or depressed for at least two weeks in a row in the last 12 months.

Safety

Aboriginal students generally reported feeling safer in their local area, at school, on public transport, and at home, compared to non-Aboriginal students.

However, they were also more likely to report never feeling safe in their home compared to non-Aboriginal students (3% vs 1%). Feeling safe in these settings was associated with greater resilience, happiness and life satisfaction.

Figure 2: Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting they feel safe all the time, by Aboriginal status 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' or 'never'.

When asked: 'If there was one thing you could change about your local area, what would it be?', 13 per cent of Aboriginal students mentioned crime, drugs or safety.

Aboriginal students were more likely to report being teased about their cultural background at school (52%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (33%).

Being teased about culture was strongly associated with prolonged sadness and lower life satisfaction. Recent studies have reported links between childhood experiences of racial discrimination and health risks over the longer term.^{2,3}

Material wellbeing

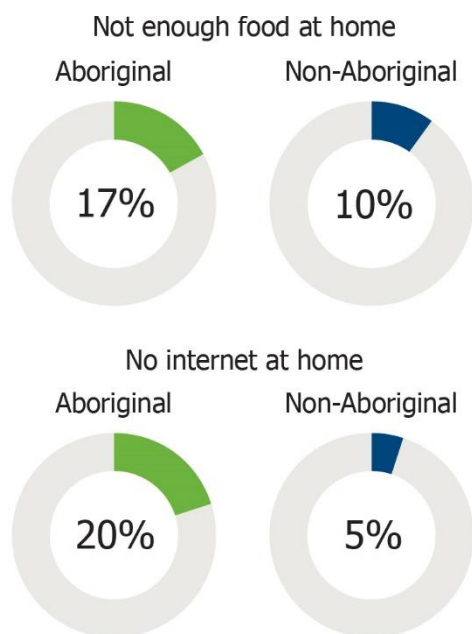
More Aboriginal students sometimes or never have enough food at home compared to non-Aboriginal students (17% vs 10%). Food scarcity at home was associated with lower life satisfaction, resilience and happiness.

Furthermore, a greater proportion of Aboriginal students do not have access to the internet at home (80% vs 95%), do not have enough money in their family to go on a school excursion (18% vs 11%), or their family does



not own a car for family transport (10% vs 4%), compared to non-Aboriginal students. Fewer Aboriginal students have a bedroom to themselves (74%, compared to 88% non-Aboriginal students).

Figure 3: Material wellbeing of Year 4 to Year 12 students, by Aboriginal status



Note: Food at home percentage reflects the proportion of students who report 'sometimes' or 'never' having enough food at home if hungry.

Family, community and school engagement

Family

While there are distinct cultural differences in family and community practices and experiences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, the indicators of family cohesion and the associations with wellbeing reported were similar between students.

About 21 per cent of Aboriginal students said they were worried about whether someone in their home will be fighting, 23 per cent reported their family does not get along well and 16 per cent have stayed away from home overnight more than once because of a problem in the last 12 months.

How well a student's family gets along and how much they worry about family fighting was associated with prolonged sadness, increased stress, along with decreased happiness and

resilience, highlighting family conflict and cohesion as particularly impactful.

The majority of Aboriginal students who reported that their family does not get along well (75%) or they worry about family fighting (80%) felt sad or depressed (for at least two weeks in a row in the last 12 months). However, a greater proportion of Aboriginal students were worried a lot about their family hurting themselves (19%) or getting arrested (16%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (13% and 10%, respectively). Worrying about family hurting themselves was associated with lower life satisfaction.

Community

A higher proportion of Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal students agreed a lot that when they go to the shops, people there are friendly (40% vs 31%) and that they feel like they belong in their community (38% vs 27%).

About 65% of Aboriginal students speak at least a little Aboriginal language, and 49% engage in cultural activities.

"I think that it would be helpful to see more acceptance of people that are different. I live in a predominantly white neighbourhood and I often feel pretty isolated and judged. I get followed when I go to the shops because people think I'm gonna shoplift. It's a bit upsetting being judged all the time when I just want to be accepted."

School engagement

A higher proportion of Aboriginal primary school students were very worried if they miss school (20%, compared to 12% of non-Aboriginal students).

It was also more common for Aboriginal students to like school a lot (37%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (29%).

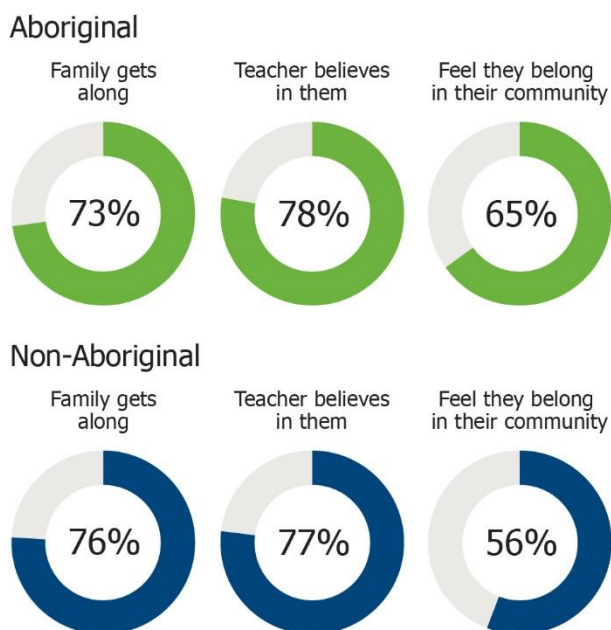
Additionally, Aboriginal students were more likely to report it is very much true a teacher or other adult really cares about them at their school (47%), and thinks they will achieve good things (57%), compared to non-Aboriginal students (32% and 47% respectively). The engagement of teachers was positively associated with



student engagement in schooling, resilience (can achieve goals even if hard) and happiness.

While this is promising, there were some socio-behavioural indicators of concern. Fewer Aboriginal students usually get along with their class mates (59%) or teachers (60%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (68% and 68% respectively). High school Aboriginal students were also more likely to have wagged school (22%) or been suspended (28%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (12% and 14% respectively).

Figure 4: Family, community and school engagement for Year 7 to Year 12 students, by Aboriginal status



Note: Percentage reflects the proportion of students who reported their family gets along 'well' or 'very well', responded 'pretty much' or 'very much' to if a teacher believed in them, and if they 'agreed a bit' or 'agreed a lot' that they belong in their community.

Half as many Aboriginal students see their future education involving university (29%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (59%).

It is important to note that while this report provides summary findings of Aboriginal students reporting on health and wellbeing across WA, it can be misleading to generalise findings and challenges across individual communities. Direct community engagement by establishing long-term relationships is advised for evaluating Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

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

Endnotes

1. Hirshkowitz M et al 2015, National sleep foundation's sleep time duration recommendations: Methodology and results summary, *Sleep Health*, 1(1), 40-43
2. Priest N et al 2020, Experiences of racial discrimination and cardiometabolic risk among Australian children, *Brain, Behaviour and Immunity*, Feb 2020.
3. Cave L et al 2019, Racial discrimination and the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: Does the timing of first exposure matter?, *SSM Population Health*, Vol 9.

