

Data snapshot

Students' views on their mental health

A key finding in the Speaking Out Survey 2021 (SOS21) conducted with 16,532 WA students is that mental health issues are a significant concern for children and young people – this supports the findings of the Commissioner's Speaking Out Survey 2019 results.

Mental health

A substantial number of Year 7 to Year 12 students report poor life satisfaction, low self-esteem, high levels of stress and the feeling they can't cope with life's challenges.

Happiness and life satisfaction

The majority of students in Years 9 to 12 reported having felt depressed, sad or blue for two weeks or more in a row during the past year (58%). Female students were significantly more likely to report having felt this way compared to their male peers (68% vs 47%). There were no significant differences across metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

For students in Years 4 to 6, 92 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am happy with myself". In contrast, only 70 per cent of high school students agreed or strongly agreed they feel happy with themselves. More than three times as many high school students disagreed or strongly disagreed compared to Year 4 to 6 students (30% vs 8%).

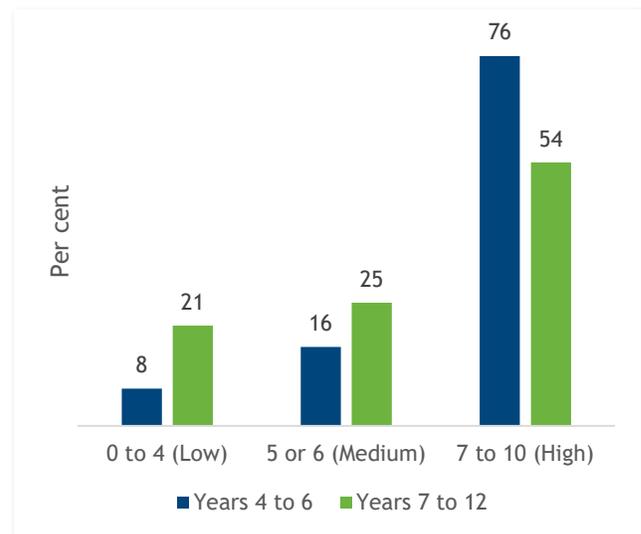
More than double the proportion of female high school students than male disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I am happy with myself" (39% compared to 18%).

The life satisfaction of students followed the same trend. Almost 76 per cent of students in Years 4 to 6 reported a high life satisfaction (7

to 10 out of 10), while only 54 per cent of high school students reported similarly.

Low life satisfaction (0 to 4) was reported by 8 per cent of Year 4 to 6 students compared to 21 per cent of high school students.

Figure 1: Year 7 to 12 students rating their life satisfaction on a scale of '0' to '10'



Female high school students were twice as likely to report low life satisfaction (26%) compared to their male counterparts (13%).

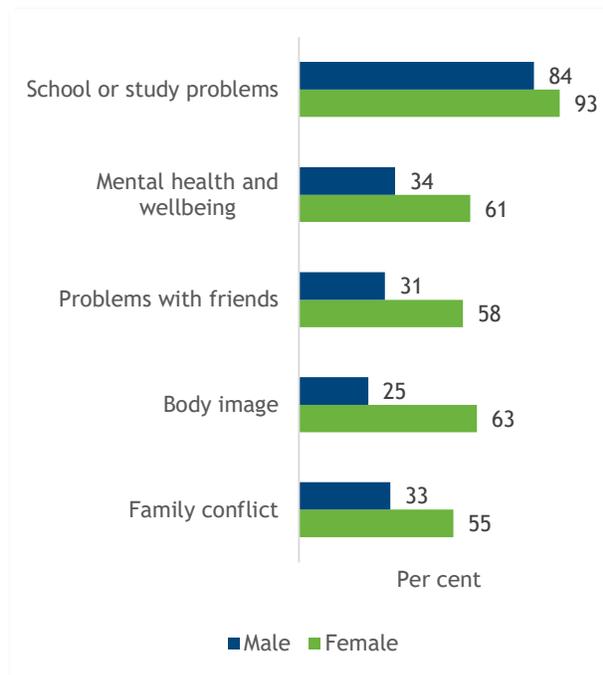
Stress

For Year 9 to 12 students, the top five reported stressors were: school or study problems (89%), mental health and wellbeing (49%), problems with friends (45%), body image (45%) and family conflict (45%).

Female students were more likely to report stress from each of the five stressors compared to male students. For example, female students were more than 2.5 times as likely as male

students to report related stress related to body image (63% vs 25%).

Figure 2: Year 9 to Year 12 students reporting sources of stress in the last year



Resilience

Resilience is the ability to cope and thrive in the face of negative events, challenges or adversity. The majority of high school students agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

“I can deal with things that happen in my life.” (71%)

“I can achieve my goals even if it is hard.” (66%)

Female students reported a significantly lower proportion of affirmative responses (agree or strongly agree) compared to male students across both these indicators of resilience.

Protective and risk factors

A range of protective and risk factors can help or hinder mental health and wellbeing outcomes, including supportive relationships and connectedness and knowledge of, and access to, support.

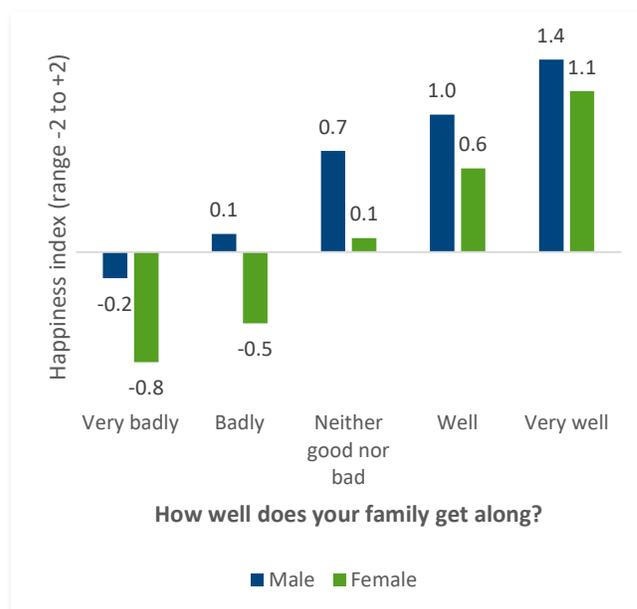
Supportive relationships and connectedness

Among high school students, 13 per cent said they do not live with a parent or adult they can talk to about their problems.

Female students were more than twice as likely to report they do not live with a parent who will listen to them if they have something to say (8%) compared to their male peers (4%).

Supportive relationships with parents and whether one’s family gets along were strongly associated with mental health outcomes, including feeling happy with themselves.

Figure 3: Happy with myself and how well family gets along, Years 7 to 12



Overall, the majority of students reported they had enough friends (84%); however, the result was appreciably lower for Year 10 to 12 female students at 77 per cent.

Connectedness via electronic devices can be both protective against, and a risk factor for, mental health issues. The desire to stay connected increased between primary and high school, with 27 per cent of primary school students and 36 per cent of high school students being bothered when they could not use the internet. This increase was particularly evident for female students rising from 24 per cent in

Years 4 to 6 to 39 per cent in Years 7 to 12 (compared to 28% to 31% for male students).

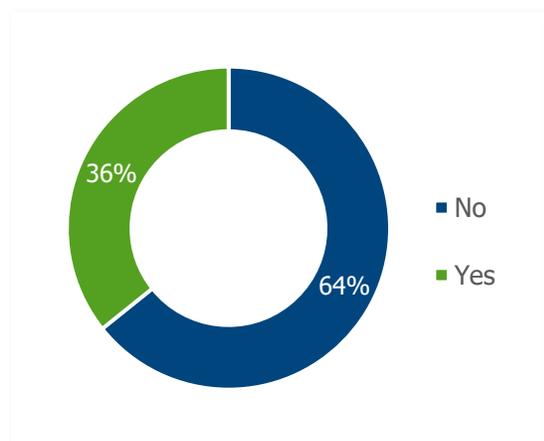
At the same time, in high school about 12 per cent of students are regularly going without eating or sleeping because of the internet or games, while 14 per cent are going without sleep due to mobile phone use (female: 17%, male: 10%).

Knowledge and access to support

Two-thirds (67%) of high school students knew where to seek support for mental health issues in their school and 60 per cent knew where to seek help online. However, this decreased to less than half when it came to seeking support in their local area (48%).

More than one-third of high school students had accessed mental health services in the past 12 months (36%). However, one in four students report not being able to access health support when required (25%).

Figure 4: Have accessed mental health services in last 12 months, Years 7 to 12



Female students report less awareness of available health resources and were twice as likely to report difficulties accessing support when required compared to male students (32% vs 16%). For those young people reporting difficulties accessing support the main reason was they felt ashamed or embarrassed (64%).

Physical and emotional safety

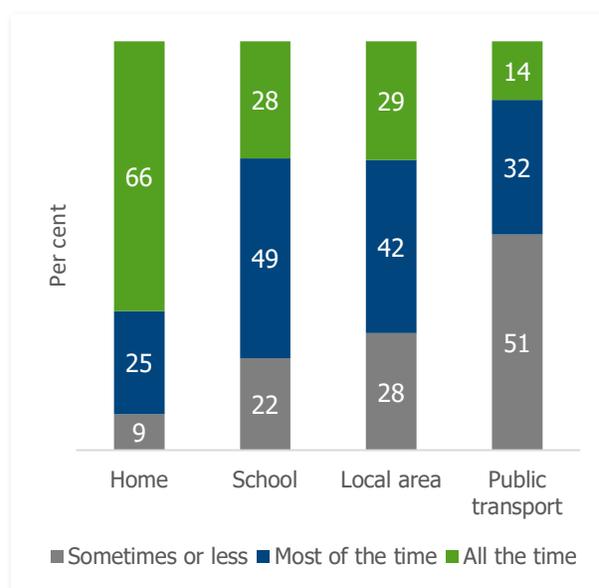
Feeling safe and secure is a critical foundation for young people’s healthy development both physically and mentally. This not only includes

physical safety (the absence of harm or injury by any person) but emotional and psychological safety as well, whereby children and young people are provided dependable and supportive environments, are safe to express how they feel, and are free from bullying and intimidation.

Physical safety

Many students do not always feel safe in the home, school and the community. For Year 7 to 12 students this is true of over one-third (34%) of students in the home, over two-thirds (72%) at school (72%) and in the community (71%).

Figure 5: Feeling safe by location, Years 7 to 12



Note: Columns do not all add up to 100% as responses “I’d prefer not to say” and “Do not apply” were omitted from this figure

Analysis shows that not feeling safe in these environments is associated with lower resilience, happiness and wellbeing.

For more information on the impact feeling unsafe has on mental health refer to the *Data Snapshot: Students’ views on their safety*.

Family worry

The safety and wellbeing of parents and family is also an essential part of providing a dependable and supportive environment for children and young people. Worrying about family safety and conflict can have significant adverse impacts on the mental wellbeing of children and young people.

One-in-four of all Year 4 to Year 12 students were at least somewhat worried about family fighting (25%), while one-in-five worried that someone in their home or family would hurt someone else (17%) or themselves (22%).

Family worry 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 also stronger in female students compared to their male peers.

Body image

Almost one-third (32%) of students in Years 4 to 6 and one-half (46%) of high school students care very much about how they look. Female high school students are significantly more likely than their male peers to care very much about how they look (59% vs 33%).

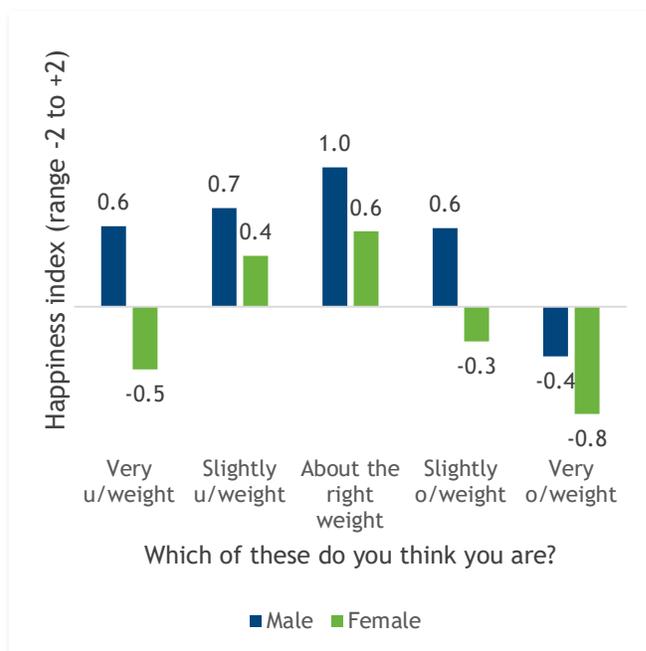
Nearly one-half (49%) of students in Years 4 to 12 reported worrying a little or a lot about their weight.

Two-thirds (66%) of female high school students worried about their weight compared to 39 per cent of male students.

Worrying about weight was associated with lower resilience, life satisfaction, happiness, higher stress and skipping meals. Figure 7 presents the relationship between self-perception of weight and feelings of happiness.

Notably, female students' happiness scores (I am happy with myself) were much more affected than male students' scores when they perceived themselves to be underweight (u/weight) or overweight (o/weight).

Figure 6: Body self-perception and happiness, Years 7 to 12



The Speaking Out Survey is a large-scale representative survey of WA children and young people. The full Speaking Out Survey report and additional Indicators of Wellbeing data are available at ccyp.wa.gov.au