



Data snapshot

Aboriginal students' views on their wellbeing

In 2021, the Commissioner conducted the Speaking Out Survey 2021 (SOS21) with 16,532 WA Year 4 to Year 12 students, including 1,503 Aboriginal students.

A key finding of the survey was that while Aboriginal students fared less well than non-Aboriginal students in terms of material needs and family worries, many reported high self-esteem and a sense of belonging in their communities.

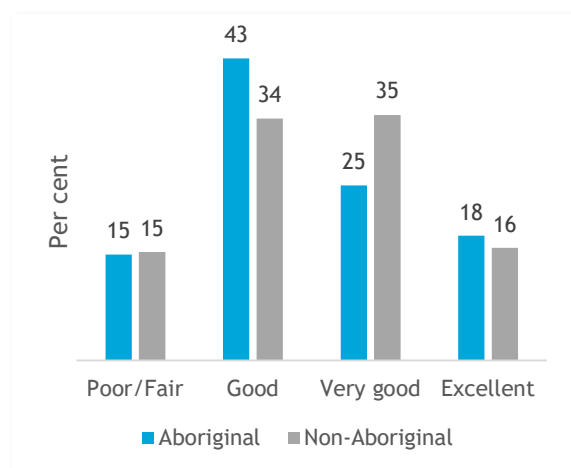
Physical health

General health

Less than one-half (42%) of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 reported having very good or excellent health, while 15 per cent reported their health was only poor or fair.

Aboriginal students were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to rate their health as good, rather than very good.

Figure 1: Self-reported health rating of Year 4 to Year 12 students by Aboriginal status



Aboriginal students in remote areas were marginally less likely than others to report they had very good or excellent health (metropolitan: 45%, regional: 42%, remote: 36%).

Healthy behaviours

Six per cent of Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12 report never eating vegetables (Non-Aboriginal students: 2%), with Aboriginal students in the metropolitan area more likely than those in regional and remote areas to report this.

One-in-10 (11%) Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 reported not brushing their teeth the previous day (Non-Aboriginal students: 4%).

One-in-five (20%) Aboriginal Year 4 to Year 6 students reported they go to sleep after 10pm on a school night (Non-Aboriginal: 10%).

More than one-half (56%) of Aboriginal students in Years 7 to 12 reported doing vigorous exercise 3 or more times in the last 7 days, while 9 per cent reported that they 'do not exercise'.

Almost one-third (32%) of Aboriginal high school students reported they have tried smoking cigarettes/tobacco (non-Aboriginal: 17%) and 44 per cent reported they have friends who smoke.

Almost one-half (47%) of Aboriginal high school students have drunk alcohol (more than just a sip) (non-Aboriginal: 34%) and 40 per cent of Aboriginal students in Years 9 to 12 have had experiences with marijuana (Non-Aboriginal: 24%).

Aboriginal students in remote areas were marginally less likely than those in metropolitan or regional areas to have drunk alcohol or had experiences with marijuana.

Mental health

Happiness and life satisfaction

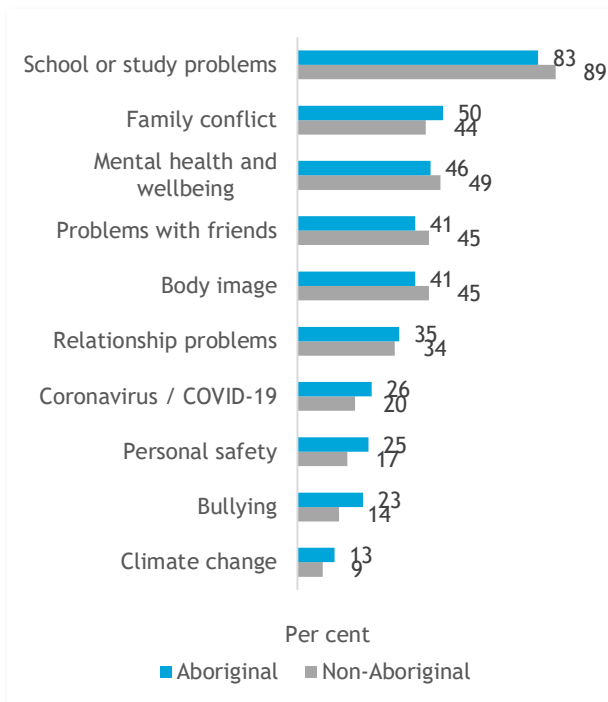
The majority (73%) of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 6, reported high life satisfaction (7 to 10 out of 10). In contrast, only 54 per cent of Aboriginal high school students reported high life satisfaction and 20 per cent reported low life satisfaction (rating of 0 to 4). These results are similar to non-Aboriginal students.

Consistent with non-Aboriginal students, female Aboriginal high school students were more likely than their male peers to report low life satisfaction (male: 13%, female: 24%).

About 58 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.

In the last year, Aboriginal students in Years 9 to 12 experienced similar stressors to non-Aboriginal students, although they were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to feel stressed about bullying.

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



These results are similar across metropolitan, regional and remote areas.

Positive self-image

The majority of Aboriginal high school students report that they feel good about themselves (69%), can achieve their goals even if it is hard (66%) and can deal with things that happen in their life (70%).

The 2019 survey reported that female Aboriginal students were more likely to have positive self-esteem than non-Aboriginal female students – these results were not affirmed by the 2021 data. In 2021, similarly low proportions of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal female students strongly agreed they feel good about themselves (Aboriginal: 25%, non-Aboriginal: 23%).

Getting support

Aboriginal students were marginally less likely than non-Aboriginal students to know where to get help for mental health worries if they needed it. Around one-half of Aboriginal high school students knew where to seek support for mental health worries in various locations, including in their school (59%), online (46%) and in their local area (51%). Students in remote areas were marginally more likely than metropolitan and regional students to know where to get help at school and in their local community.

More than one-third of Aboriginal high school students had sought help for mental health worries in the past 12 months (38%). For students who had sought help in the last 12 months, the top four most helpful sources were parents (70%), friends (69%), other family (61%) and teachers (48%).

However, one-in-four Aboriginal high school students reported not being able to access general health support when they needed it (25%). Students in the metropolitan area were more likely than those in regional and remote areas to have not been able to access support.

Feeling safe

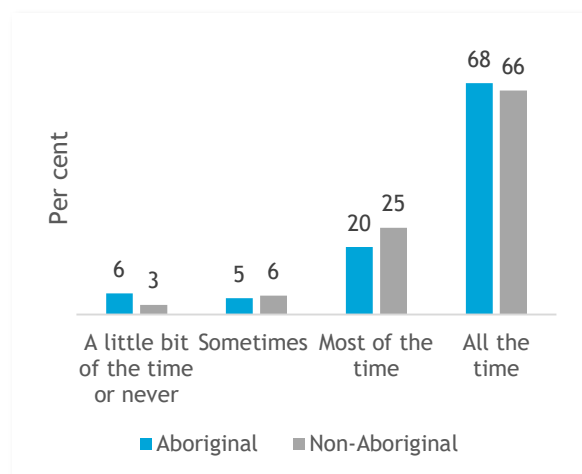
The majority of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 reported feeling safe all of the time or most of the time in their local area (65%), at school (71%) and in their home (87%). A lower

proportion of students reported feeling safe all the time or most of the time on public transport (44%). These results are consistent with non-Aboriginal students.

However, a greater proportion of Aboriginal students than non-Aboriginal students reported never feeling safe at home (3% vs 1%) or in their local area (5% vs 2%).

Feeling safe in these settings was associated with greater resilience, happiness and life satisfaction.

Figure 3: Year 4 to Year 12 students reporting how often they feel safe at home by Aboriginal status



Almost forty per cent (39%) of Aboriginal students report having been bullied or cyberbullied by students at their school. Of the students who reported being bullied in the last 3 months, Aboriginal students were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to have been teased about their cultural background or skin colour (59% vs 25%).

Being teased in this way was strongly associated with lower life satisfaction and resilience.

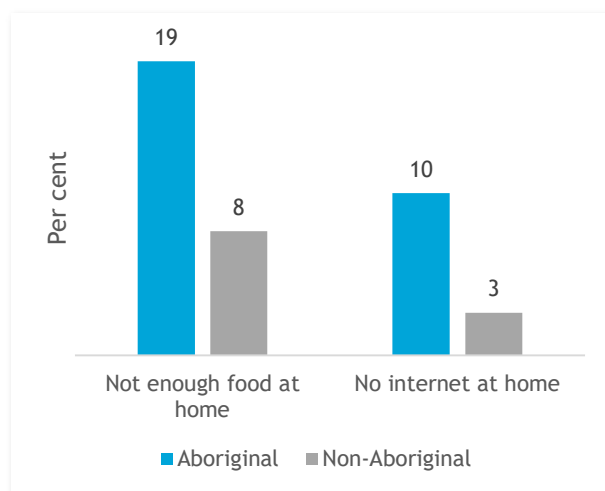
Material wellbeing

One-in-five (19%) Aboriginal students sometimes or never have enough food to eat at home, compared to 8 per cent of non-Aboriginal students. Food scarcity at home was associated with lower life satisfaction, resilience and happiness.

Aboriginal students are more likely than non-Aboriginal students to not have a family car (9%

vs 2%), not have access to the internet at home (10% vs 3%) and not have enough money to go on a school excursion (18% vs 8%).

Figure 4: 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.

Aboriginal Year 4 to Year 12 students are nearly three times as likely as non-Aboriginal students to have moved homes two or more times in the past 12 months (17% vs 6%).

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 reported wellbeing were similar between students.

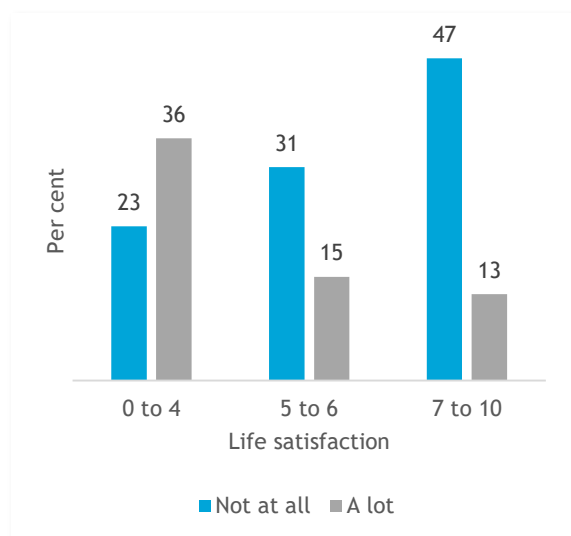
Three-quarters (74%) of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 12 report that their family gets along well. However, 30 per cent said they were worried a lot or somewhat about whether someone in their home will be fighting, and 42 per cent of Aboriginal high school students have stayed away from home overnight because of a problem.

A greater proportion of Aboriginal students than non-Aboriginal were worried a lot about their

family hurting themselves (16% vs 11%) or hurt somebody else (16% vs 8%).

Aboriginal students who worry a lot about family fighting were more likely to feel sad or depressed (for at least two weeks in a row in the last 12 months) and have low life satisfaction.

Figure 5: Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students reporting worry about family fighting by life satisfaction



Community and culture

Two-thirds (68%) of Year 4 to Year 12 Aboriginal students reported that they know their family's country and 59 per cent speak at least a little Aboriginal language. Three-quarters (77%) of students in remote locations speak a little or more Aboriginal language.

Aboriginal high school students were more likely than non-Aboriginal to feel like they belong in their community (65% vs 56%). Two-thirds of Aboriginal high school students report that when they go to the shops, people there are friendly. However, a large minority (15%) disagreed with this statement.

School engagement

A significant majority (88%) of Aboriginal students agree that it is important to be at school everyday. Two-thirds (65%) of Aboriginal students in Years 4 to 6 like school compared to 36 per cent of students in Years 7 to 12. However, two-thirds (66%) of Aboriginal high school students agree that school is a place

where they belong. These results are similar to non-Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal students are much more likely than non-Aboriginal students to have attended multiple schools since they started primary school or high school, with 37 per cent of Year 4 to Year 6 Aboriginal students having attended three or more schools since they started primary school (non-Aboriginal: 16%).

High school Aboriginal students were also more likely to have wagged school (35%) or been suspended (33%) compared to non-Aboriginal students (14% and 13% respectively).

Aboriginal students were less likely than non-Aboriginal students to report that they usually get along with their classmates (58% vs 71%). Aboriginal students were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to say it is very much true a teacher or other adult at their school really cares about them (42% vs 32%) or thinks they will achieve good things (51% vs 43%).

Engagement with teachers was positively associated with student engagement in school and happiness.

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

A further publication on the views and experiences of Aboriginal students who live in remote areas of WA is forthcoming.