



Australian Government
Office for Youth

State of Australia's Young People



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Foreword



I'm very pleased to be releasing the State of Australia's Young People: A report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people. This report presents a comprehensive picture of how young Australians are faring by bringing together data from a variety of sources and drawing on the comments of young people themselves.

Overall the report presents a positive picture, showing how important young people are to our country and why it makes good economic and social sense for governments to invest in lifting outcomes for all young people.

While the report shows that by and large young people are healthy, happy and productive, it also highlights some areas of real concern including:

- Not all young people are on the same footing. Indigenous young people, those not engaged in education or work, young people with a disability and those living in low socio economic households are at serious risk of social exclusion.
- 1 in 4 young people are living with a mental disorder and 1 in 3 young people experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress
- Almost 1 in 3 young people are an unhealthy weight (either over or under weight)
- Male and female teenagers aged 15–19 years had the highest hospitalisation rates for acute intoxication from alcohol among all age groups
- Young people are more likely to become victims of some violent crimes (including sexual offences and assaults) and are less likely than older victims to report a violent crime

The report also highlights emerging issues like the increasing risk that cyber bullying is posing to young people's wellbeing and underlines the important role that families, education and employment play in young people's development.

I would like to thank the authors and all the individuals and organisations who contributed to the development of the first State of Australia's Young People report.

I look forward to considering these findings over the coming months as I work with the Prime Minister and Australian young people to develop a National Strategy for Young Australians.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Kate Ellis'.

Kate Ellis
Minister for Early Childhood Education, Childcare and Youth



STATE OF AUSTRALIA'S YOUNG PEOPLE:

A Report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people

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Report for:

Office for Youth, DEEWR

Social Policy Research Centre

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Large parts of this report are based on ABS and HILDA datasets. The report also uses unit record data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this report, however, are those of the authors and should not be attributed to either FaHCSIA or the Melbourne Institute.

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Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ARACY	Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth
ARC	Australian Research Council
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CIDI	Composite International Diagnostic Interview
DEECD	Victorian Government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DEEWR	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DSM-IV	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition
FaHCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
FYA	Foundation for Young Australians
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Distribution in Australia
ICD-10	International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision
IHSS	Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy
NATSIS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
NSW DOCS	New South Wales Department of Community Services
NT	Northern Territory
NYARS	National Youth Affairs Research Scheme
OfY	Office for Youth
SDAC	Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers
SES	Socio economic Status
SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
UNSW	University of New South Wales
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WHO	World Health Organization
YES	Youth Electoral Study

1 Executive Summary

The Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, was commissioned in 2009 by the Office for Youth to complete the *State of Australia's Young People* report. This report forms part of the first work plan of the Australian Government Office for Youth, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The *State of Australia's Young People* describes how young people aged 12–24 years in Australia are faring and identifies those who may need additional support to do well. The report aims to inform the Office for Youth as it develops a National Strategy for Young Australians (Australian Government Office for Youth, 2009).

Using a literature review, quantitative secondary data analysis and qualitative data from focus groups with young people and consultations with other key stakeholders, this report provides a clear picture of the overall state of Australia's young people. It describes who Australian young people are, how they fare in key domains of life, the major issues and challenges they face and the broad contributions they make to Australian society.

After outlining the demographics of Australia's young people, the report is shaped around main areas that young people participate in and that are critical for their longer-term outcomes: education, employment and income, domestic work and care, technology use, social participation (relationships with family and friends, community participation, volunteering and civic engagement), disability, physical and mental health and social issues. The key findings are below.

Who are Australia's young people?

Young people aged 12–24 represent one fifth of the Australian population. While most young people live in cities with their parents, almost one in every hundred young person is homeless. Young people are a culturally and linguistically diverse population, with a high proportion of Indigenous young people (compared to the total population), as well as people born overseas and speaking a language other than English at home. Young people have some concerns about the economic climate but are generally confident and optimistic about their future.

- One in five Australians are aged 12–24 years and 28% of all households contain a young person.
- Two in three 12–19-year-olds live at home with two parents (66%), and a further 20% live with one parent.
- Indigenous people account for 3.6% of all 15–19-year-olds and 2.8% of all young people aged 20–24 years.
- One in five Australian young people were born overseas – mostly in Asia (6.6%) or Europe (2.6%).
- One in five speak a language other than English at home – mostly an Asian language (10%) or another European language (4%)

How many young people are in education and what educational attainment do young people have who have already left education?

Young people's future outcomes are strongly related to their education. The majority of young people are currently in some form of education. For those who have left education, most had achieved Year 12, a Vocational Education and Training (VET) qualification or a university degree. Educational attainment has generally improved over time and Australia compares well internationally in terms of time spent in formal education and scientific, reading, writing and mathematical literacy. However, key groups of young people are at risk of poor educational attainment and performance, particularly young Indigenous Australians, those from low socio economic status (SES) backgrounds and those living in rural and remote areas.

In 2006, around 63% of young people aged 12–24 years were engaged in some form of education (43% in secondary school, 20% in tertiary education, and 6% in VET).

- Of the 15-24-year-olds not enrolled in study in 2006 (around 1.1 million), two-thirds had completed Year 12, attained a VET certificate, or completed a university degree. One in five only reached Year 10 or below.
- In 2004, the Year 12 completion rate for school students living in areas in the bottom three tenths of the SES scale was 59%, compared to 79% for the top three (AIHW, 2008c: 122).
- Just over half of all Indigenous 15-19-year-olds are enrolled in education compared to 76% of non-Indigenous 15-19-year-olds (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).
- Only one-quarter of Indigenous 15–19-year-olds not currently attending school and one-third of 20–24-year-olds have completed Year 12 (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).
- 14% of Indigenous 20–24-year-olds are in post-secondary education, compared to 35% of non-Indigenous 20–24-year-olds (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).

To what extent are young people working, looking for work, or out of the labour force?

Almost half of teenagers and two in three young adults are employed. Employment for young people is often on a part-time or casual basis because of the combination of paid work and study. This can help young people transition into full-time work and helps young people avoid living in a household in poverty. Indigenous young people, those from a low SES background and those who have not completed Year 12 are most at risk of being out of the labour force. Unemployment has increased considerably for young people as a result of the recent global economic crisis and young people both in and out of work are concerned about their future employment prospects.

- In 2006, 44% of 15-19-year-olds and 69% of 20-24-year-olds were employed (ABS Census, 2006).
- Only 31% of Indigenous teenagers were employed, compared to nearly 44% of non-Indigenous 15–19-year-olds.
- Just under 50% of Indigenous young adults aged 20–24 years were employed, in comparison with 69% of non-Indigenous young adults.
- Indigenous young people who are employed are more likely than their counterparts in the wider Australian population to be in part-time, low-paid, insecure jobs (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).
- The latest seasonally adjusted unemployment rate is 11.9% for 15–24-year-olds (August 2009, includes young people in education looking for work, ABS, 2009b).
- 26% of Indigenous 15–19-year-olds and 19% of 20–24-year-olds were unemployed in 2006 (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).
- More Indigenous young people (24%) highly valued getting a job, compared to non-Indigenous young people (16%) (Mission Australia, 2008).

What factors impact on young people's income?

Young people's income is closely tied to their participation in employment and education. Although young people who do not work have very low incomes, most are in education and living with their parents. Young women are also likely to have lower incomes than young men. Those at particular risk of poverty are young people living alone, those who do not have family support, and those young people born overseas who do not speak English at home. Generally, however, young people experience a sharp increase in income as they get older and most move into employment. A small but substantial proportion of young people have experience of debt.

- Levels of personal income steadily increase between 15 and 24 years of age.
- Young women's income was significantly less than young men's. At 24 years, women have almost peaked in their earning capacity, while men's earnings increase considerably as they get older.
- Just over half 18–24-year-olds have some consumer debt, mostly car loans or other personal loans, and about half of those have a credit card.
- About one-fifth of young people with credit cards hardly ever or never pay the full balance every month.
- More than a quarter of 12–17-year-olds surveyed in 2007 owed money, and 36% had been in debt (mostly to parents, family members or friends).

How much time do young people spend on unpaid domestic work and care?

On average, all young people contribute some unpaid domestic work and care within their households. Time spent on domestic activities is largely contingent on the other activities young people undertake, such as education and/or work. However, time spent in domestic work is higher for young women than young men, regardless of the other activities they participate in.

- Young women aged 15–19-years-old spend 6.5 hours in domestic work and care, compared to 4.2 for men in the same age group, while women aged 20–24-year-olds spend 13.3 hours, compared to 4.9 for men.
- Although the time females spend on domestic activities increases as they get older, it barely fluctuates as men age.
- Male 15–19-year-olds, who do not work or study, spend the most time on domestic activities at 21 hours per week. However, male 20–24-year-olds out of work and study only contributing an average of 9 hours per week in domestic work.
- Females who participated in neither education nor paid work had the highest levels of domestic activity at 22 hours for 15–19-year-olds and 53 hours for 20–24-year-olds.

Overall, how productive are young people?

Most young people lead very productive lives. They spend many hours of their week undertaking productive activities – paid work, education and/or domestic and care activities. The time young people spend on productive activities differs by age, gender and on the combinations of activities undertaken. For example, males are spending more time working and in education and fewer hours on domestic work and care activities than their female counterparts. Most females aged 20–years-old who are not working or studying spend long hours on domestic work and care. By contrast, males who are out of work and education are particularly at risk because they are disengaged from almost all productive activities.

- Young people who combine paid work, education and domestic activities spend large proportions of their week on productive activity. 15–19-year-olds in this situation approach or exceed 40 hours per week and 20–24-year-olds approach or exceed 50 hours per week.
- Male and female teenagers aged 15–19-years, who do not work or study, spend approximately 20 hours per week on domestic and care responsibilities.
- The gender division is stark for 20–24-year-olds not working or studying, with females spending 53 hours per week on domestic work and care, compared to only 9 hours for their male counterparts.

To what extent do young people use technology?

New technology has great social, economic and personal benefits for young people, despite documented costs associated with excessive consumption. Most young people are more adept at using new technologies than their older peers and many seem able to negotiate the challenges and potential pit-falls technology presents. However, the small numbers of young people who do not use technology (these are most likely to be young people from disadvantaged backgrounds), either through choice or lack of access, may become increasingly isolated as the importance of technology continues to grow.

- Young people (aged 8–17 years) watched approximately 2 hours of television each day.
- In 2007, nine out of 10 Australian families had an internet connection and three-quarters had broadband internet.
- Young people (aged 8–17 years) spent an average of 1¼ hours online each day.
- Young women were more likely to use the internet for communication; young men were more likely to play computer games.
- In 2007, nine out of ten 17-year-old Australians used a mobile telephone, with young women more likely to have a mobile than young men.
- Young people from non-English speaking backgrounds and young men were less likely to use mobile phones and more likely to report being reluctant to use a mobile phone.
- Young people from relatively poorer areas used their mobile more frequently than those from the relatively wealthier areas.

Why are family relationships and friendships important and how much time do young people spend with family and friends?

Young people, especially those who live at home, spend a substantial proportion of their time with their families and most report having healthy relationships with them. Strong friendships and family relationships are critical for young people's social and emotional development. Young people who neither study nor work spend the most time with their families. Young people most at risk from social isolation are those without family support who do not study or work, those who do not have friends and young people with a disability. For most young people, friends are more important than intimate relationships, although the nature and importance of such relationships grows with age.

- On average, young people spend 40 hours a week with their family and most report having close relationships.
- Factors impacting on the nature of family relationships include gender, age, location and cultural background.
- Friends are an important source of support for young people and they highly value their social networks.
- Most young people (94%) report having friends they can confide in and, on average spend 20 hours per week with their friends.
- 2% of 12–19-year-olds and 20% of 20–24-year-olds live with a partner.

What kinds of leisure activities do young people participate in and how much time is invested in these activities?

As well as spending time with friends, in education and at work, young people are engaged in a range of leisure activities including watching TV, playing computer games, reading, entertainment, hobbies and sport and outdoor activities. Factors impacting on participation in physical activity include gender, engagement in work or education, cultural background, disability, interest and time.

- Leisure time accounts for approximately 24% of 15–19-year-olds time and 21% of 20–24-year-olds time, and as productive time increases (work, education and caring), leisure time decreases.
- Over two-thirds of young people engage in some form of physical activity, although less than half engage in moderate to vigorous exercise, as is recommended.

To what extent do young people volunteer and take part in civic activities?

Most of young people's productive time is spent in education and/or work, but they also spend some time volunteering and/or taking part in community based civic activities. Young people who volunteer are most likely to be involved in education and those in paid work are still more likely to volunteer than young people who neither work nor study. Age, geographic location and socio economic status can also impact on young people's propensity to volunteer.

- Around one in three young people volunteer, but the proportion of young people who volunteer regularly is low.
- Reasons young people give for volunteering include: to help others or the community, personal satisfaction, to do something worthwhile, and personal or family reasons.
- Young people do not believe that compulsory programs qualify as volunteering, and many feel exploited and stigmatised by them.

Are young people civically engaged?

Educated young people are more likely to be involved in civic activities. Participation in civic activities is not generally high among young people, but some young people are very proactively involved and engaged. Two of the most common civic activities are voting and, in recent years, looking after the environment. While most young people are enrolled to vote, one in five young people over 18 years are not. Similarly, young people's response to the environment is predominately concern, but young people's views are also surprisingly mixed.

- Young people in 2006 were found to be slightly less likely to engage in civic activities than older people.
- Only 80% of 18–25-year-olds are enrolled to vote, in comparison with 95% of the eligible population.
- Youth is not the only factor in this comparatively low level of enrolment; disadvantage and marginalisation are relevant as well.
- Young people aged 12–25 years from diverse backgrounds – Indigenous, CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse), low SES, disability, and out-of-home care – are not widely involved in decision-making processes, despite official support.

Are young people religious?

Young Australians aged 15–24 years were less likely than any other age group to say religion was important in their lives, although the estimates of its importance varied widely according to denomination. Nevertheless, almost two-thirds of young Australians aged 12–24 years acknowledged a religious affiliation, 23% indicated that they had no religion, and the remaining 13% did not specify any:

- Most identified as Christian (58%), and most Christians were either Catholics or Anglicans.
- The largest non-Christian religious affiliation was Islam.

What types of disability and health problems do young people have?

The majority of young people are disability free and generally in good physical and mental health. The total number of young people with a disability is not clear. National surveys report that approximately one in ten young people have a disability. However, given the numbers of young people with a mental disorder, physical health problem and/or cognitive disability, the rate is likely to be much higher.

With one in four experiencing a mental disorder, one in three young people under moderate to high psychological distress, and suicide being the leading cause of death for this age group, arguably, mental health is one of the most significant issues facing young people. Mental health problems, along with long-term physical health conditions and physical, cognitive and intellectual disability can affect young people's well-being and, without adequate supports, can impact on their ability to fully participate in society.

- Almost a quarter of young people are either overweight or obese, and Indigenous young people are more likely to be obese than non-Indigenous youth.
- One in four young people 16–24 years (26%) have a mental disorder in a given year.
- 75% of adult mental and substance use disorders begin in childhood or adolescence.
- One in three of all young people experience moderate to high psychological distress.
- One in four young people who do not have a mental disorder are experiencing moderate to high psychological distress.
- Young people with high levels of psychological distress are much less likely to be in paid work or education than people with no, low or medium levels of distress.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death for young people. About 8 in every 100,000 young people 15–24 years committed suicide in 2007. Young men are more likely to commit suicide than young women.

How many young people drink alcohol and how much do they drink?

One of the most prevalent social issues among young people is alcohol use. More than half of all 15-17-year-olds and almost all 18-24-year-olds have drunk alcohol. The alcohol consumption levels of young people places a large number at risk of harm according to the 2009 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines. Young people aged 15–19-years-old also have the highest rates of hospitalisation for acute intoxication among all age groups.

- Approximately one in five 15–17-year-old males and one in ten 15–27-year-old females report drinking at least once a week.
- Among young people who drink, many consume 5 or more standard drinks on an average drinking occasion (55% males and 30% females 15–17 years; and 52% males and 37% females 18–24 years).

- A large number of young people are drinking at levels which place them at risk (NHMRC, 2009) (32% of male 15–17 year olds; 21% of female 15–17 year olds; 52% of male 18–24-year-olds; 37% of female 18–24-year-olds).
- Approximately 22% of males aged 18–24 years have an alcohol abuse disorder, compared to 16% of females in the same age group.

To what extent do young people smoke?

Only a small proportion of young people aged 15–17 smoke regularly, although smoking rates increase rapidly when young people reach early adulthood. Young men are more likely to smoke than are young women, Indigenous young people are more likely to smoke than non-Indigenous young people and those who are born in Australia are more likely to smoke than overseas-born young people.

- Just over one in ten young people aged 15–17 years reported smoking cigarettes or other tobacco products. 5% of 15–17-year-olds smoke at least weekly.
- 27% of 18–24-year-olds smoke on a daily basis, compared to 50% of Indigenous young people in the same age group.

How many young people have used illicit drugs and what drugs do they most commonly use?

A minority, but still substantial number, of young people have used illicit drugs. Cannabis and stimulants are the most commonly used illicit drugs by 18–24-year-olds.

- Approximately one in five 16-year-olds and two-fifths of 18–24-year-olds had used illicit drugs.
- 30% of young people try cannabis for the first time before they reach the age of 15 years. In contrast, first use of stimulants most frequently occurs between the ages of 19 and 24 years (27%).
- About 5% of young people aged 18–24 years are considered to have a cannabis abuse disorder; 4% are considered to have a stimulant abuse disorder.

How many young people drive dangerously?

Young people also place themselves at risk by driving dangerously. Car accidents are the second leading cause of death for young people. 20–24-year-old Australians had the highest adjudication rate of all age groups for dangerous or negligent driving.

- Men aged 20–24-year-old were seven times more likely to be involved in adjudication for dangerous or negligent driving than women in the same age group.
- The proportion of young people who reported driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol decreased from 13.4% to 12.1% between 2004 and 2007.
- Just under 3% of Australians aged 14 years or older reported driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of illicit drugs in 2007.

How many young people have sex and how safe and consensual is the sex?

Unsafe sexual activity is a major risk for young people: one in three young people who had engaged in sexual intercourse reported having unwanted sex at some point in their lives and only two-thirds of sexually active young people use condoms. This suggests the need for education campaigns based on emotional and physical health.

- One in four Year 10 students and just over half of all Year 12 students reported having engaged in sexual intercourse.
- Fewer than one in ten students (6%) reported having had sex that resulted in a pregnancy.

To what extent are young people victims of crime and how safe do they feel?

Recorded crime statistics show that a minority of young people have been the victims of crime. Nevertheless, being a victim of crime can negatively impact on health, well-being, perceptions of safety, educational achievement and socio economic attainment. Young people are also more likely than others to be affected by particular crimes, such as violence. Men, young people with disability and Indigenous young people are all more likely to be the victims of violent crime than other young people. Furthermore, regardless of crime levels, almost one quarter of young people feel unsafe walking home alone in their local area at night. Young women and young people with disability are most likely to feel unsafe.

How many young people are involved in the criminal justice system?

For most young people involved in criminal activity, the offences are minor and the behaviour is usually short-lived. For young people whose offences are more serious and persistent, crime is strongly associated with disadvantage in other areas of life. Approximately 12,000 young people are under juvenile justice supervision orders, of whom about 650 are in detention centres. Indigenous young people are over-represented in both the juvenile justice system and adult prison population.

To what extent are young people involved in child protection?

Child abuse and neglect is linked to a range of short and long-term negative outcomes including, health and well-being, educational achievement and poverty. Young people who experience abuse are often from marginalised families as well. Younger children and Indigenous young people are both over-represented in the child protection system.

Conclusion

Overall, the picture of Australia's young people is generally positive. They achieve high levels of educational attainment and performance, many young people are employed and they actively contribute to household domestic work and care. Young people also take part in community based activities, they are represented among Australia's volunteers and some are civically engaged in a range of other areas. As such, young people are highly productive and make a substantial contribution to Australian society. Most young people successfully balance the competing demands of education, work, domesticity, friends, leisure and community participation. Young people generally rely on family and friends for practical and emotional support.

While this picture illustrates a broadly successful generation of young people, these years can also be enormously challenging, and are often filled with some risk taking. Of particular concern is the number of homeless young people, the prevalence of young people having unwanted and unprotected sex, the prevalence of young people drinking alcohol at risky levels and the high numbers of young people with a mental disorder and/or experiencing psychological distress.

Risk taking and positive outcomes are not equally distributed among young people. Indigenous young people, young people from a low socio economic status background, young people who are neither in work nor study, and young people with a disability are at risk of falling behind the broader population of young people in a range of areas.

Young people with a disability are at particularly high risk. On almost every economic and social measure they are more likely to be excluded and/or at greater risk than young people who do not have a disability. It is likely that this is a result of the high number of young people with mental health problems.

The fact that key demographic characteristics increase young people's risks across a range of domains indicates that a cross-governmental, coordinated response to support these young people makes sense at a policy and practical level. Given the close relationship between educational attainment, employment and other social, health and substance use outcomes, investing in Australia's young people has important social and economic implications, not just for young people themselves, but for the country as a whole.

2 Introduction

The Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, was commissioned in 2009 by the Office for Youth to complete the *State of Australia's Young People* report. This report forms part of the first work plan of the Australian Government Office for Youth, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

The Australian Government makes a significant investment in young people through policies, programs and services which offer young people opportunities to participate, a safety net for those at risk of disengaging and seek to build young people's skills and capabilities. The Minister for Youth has overarching responsibility to lead the development of youth-specific policy and to oversee and shape the effects of broader government policies on young people. The Office for Youth was established in September 2008 to manage and coordinate these initiatives and is the auspicing body for the report.

There is a considerable amount of existing literature relating to young people in Australia. This report draws on that literature and other data sources to produce a single, comprehensive report which will be used as evidence to inform a National Strategy for Young Australians.

The *State of Australia's Young People* describes how young people 12–24 years in Australia are faring and identifies those who may need additional support to do well. The report aims to inform the Office for Youth as it develops the National Strategy for Young Australians (Australian Government Office for Youth, 2009). It also aims to deepen understanding about young people; describe young people as a distinct and important population group; and identify areas of interest and need for consideration by different government agencies.

This report adds to existing information in the field. It does so by analysing the literature, secondary datasets and data from focus groups with young people and consultations with other key stakeholders.

The context for this report is set by introducing the main demographic features of Australian young people and then addressing areas of central relevance to the lives of young people. These are divided into areas considered to be of key concern to young people themselves and other relevant stakeholders in their lives. The primary areas are education, employment, income and the economy, relationships with friends and family, and health and well-being. The report also includes sections on community engagement and social issues faced by young people. The report examines how young people are faring generally in these areas and explores which young people are doing well and which young people are facing challenges. It aims to provide a clear picture of the overall state of Australia's young people, rather than a comprehensive analysis of individual life domains. Due to the data availability, the report has a strong focus on young people aged 15–24 years.

3 Methodology

This research was conducted using three methods. These included a literature review, secondary data collection and analysis, and consultations with stakeholders – focus groups with young people and interviews with other key stakeholders.

3.1 Research methods

Literature review

The report collates and synthesises existing literature on Australian's young people. This literature comes from a wide range of sources including government and NGO reports and academic research on young people. Relevant literature was identified using a range of methods, including library databases, the internet, snowballing and references obtained from stakeholder interviews. Overall, the literature was drawn from a wide range of fields including, social policy, sociology, health, criminology, employment and education. It considers research addressing a range of geographies, from a national perspective to the local picture.

The literature has been systematically analysed to identify and describe key issues relating to the state of Australia's young people aged 12–25 years. The literature review also explores the experiences of particular groups of young people, such as Indigenous young people, young people with a disability and young people living in rural areas, and identifies particular groups of young people who are not faring as well as others.

The report also draws upon analysis and reports produced by a number of agencies. The most commonly used resources were produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and Australian Research Alliance on Children & Young People (ARACY).

Secondary data collection and analysis

Secondary datasets have been analysed to provide a coherent national picture of young Australians (12–24 years). A number of data sources containing demographic, social, health, time use and other statistics on young people were used. Datasets were selected that were nationally representative and included the latest available data at the time of analysis (March-May 2009) that covered key life domains for young people. Table 3.1 lists the datasets used and provides some basic information on the age range of young people included in the data, the number of observations and a brief description of the key information drawn from each data set.

Table 3.1: Data sources: Age range of sample, number of observations, and a brief description of the usage of the data in the report

Data source	Age range (years)	N	Brief description of usage in the report
ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing	12–24	3,507,200	Provides overall population statistics including information on education and employment, living arrangements, dwelling type, place of birth, and language spoken at home
ABS 2005 National Health Survey	15–24	3,092	Provides information on alcohol consumption, smoking and exercise
ABS 2006 General Social Survey	18–24	1,174	Provides information on civic engagement, volunteering, trust, personal safety, disability, and access to credit
ABS 2006 Time Use Survey	15–24	2,161	Provides information on time use patterns, including time in paid work, domestic work and leisure
ABS 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing	16–24	1,471	Provides information on problems associated with alcohol and illicit drug use, and mental health conditions
2007 HILDA	15–24	2,441	Provides data on income and poverty, education and employment patterns for an entire year, and information about victims of crime
2007 HILDA: Self-completed questionnaire	15–24	2,055	Provides information on smoking and alcohol consumption for young people 15–17 years, and information on the importance of religion

The data used was nationally representative. The datasets were provided by the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS), with the exception of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics of Australia (HILDA) dataset. The statistical analyses used for this report are representative of the Australian population. This was done by employing the population weights supplied with the datasets. The nature of the analysis is primarily descriptive, but at certain points multivariate analyses are conducted. Details of these analyses are provided in footnotes in the relevant sections.

Stakeholder consultations

Consultations were conducted with key stakeholders, including young people (via focus groups), and government policy makers, NGO youth sector personnel, youth advocates and academics.

Young people focus groups

Focus groups were conducted with young people throughout Australia by Elliott & Shanahan Research in April-May 2009. In total, 27 group discussions were carried out over eight locations with five-six young people per group who were between the ages of 16–24 years (Table 3.2 and Table 3.3). In total, 158 young people participated in the focus groups.

Focus group participants were targeted to understand how specific sub-groups of young people are faring. For example, groups were segmented by occupational status, cultural background, gender, age and location. Six focus groups were conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (Table 3.3). Focus group participants included young people who were students, working and/or unemployed, single or married and living within the parental home or away from the parental home.

Table 3.2: Number of focus groups by location and gender and age range of young people

	Male	Female	Total
Sydney	1 x 15–17 yrs (NESB)	–	5
	1 x 18–21 yrs (W/G)	1 x 18–21 yrs (BC)	
	1 x 22–24 yrs (NESB)	1 x 22–24 yrs (W/G)	
Melbourne	1 x 15–17 yrs (BC)	1 x 15–17 yrs (NESB)	4
	1 x 18–21 yrs (W/G)	1 x 22–24 yrs (BC)	
Adelaide	1 x 22–24 yrs (BC)	1 x 15–17 yrs (W/G)	3
	–	1 x 18–21 yrs (NESB)	
Brisbane	1 x 15–17 yrs (W/G)	–	3
	1 x 18–21 yrs (BC)	1 x 22–24 yrs (W/G)	
Ipswich	1 x 18–21 yrs (BC)	1 x 15–17 yrs (W/G)	2
Orange	1 x 22–24 yrs (W/G)	1 x 18–21 yrs (BC)	2
Warren	1 x 18–21 yrs	1 x 15–17 yrs	2
TOTAL	11	10	21

Notes: BC = Blue-collar household/occupation

W/G = White or grey-collar household/occupation

NESB = Non-English speaking background

Table 3.3: Focus groups with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

	Male	Female	Total
Sydney	1 x 15–17 yrs	1 x 22–24 yrs	2
Melbourne	1 x 18–21 yrs	1 x 15–17 yrs	2
Wagga Wagga	1 x 22–24 yrs	1 x 18–21 yrs	2
TOTAL	3	3	6

Other consultations

The research endeavoured to interview up to 15 government representatives and 10 NGO youth personnel, youth advocates and academics to capture key issues for young people. Twenty-five key stakeholders were interviewed.

The Australian Government Office for Youth identified up to 25 possible contacts. These contacts included mostly government representatives from commonwealth, state and territory governments, NGO youth sector personnel, youth advocates and academics. In addition, the Social Policy Research Centre contacted a further five non-government organisations that specifically target young people for inclusion in their programs.

Initial contact with the stakeholders was made either by telephone or email. Stakeholders were reminded that their participation was voluntary. Several of the stakeholders chose at this point to withdraw from a telephone interview. The two main reasons for withdrawing were time constraints and feeling inadequately informed about the research area. Stakeholders contacted by telephone were followed up by email to organise an interview time.

Twenty-one stakeholders agreed to participate in the study. Eight were government policy makers from commonwealth or state government departments. Nine stakeholders were from NGO organisations that specifically targeted young people. Finally, four stakeholders were either youth advocates or academics involved in research with children and young people.

Stakeholders participated in a semi-structured telephone interview for approximately 30 minutes. A time was organised that suited participants. The same interview schedule was used for all participants and they were sent a copy prior to interview. Telephone interviews were digitally recorded (with participant consent) and notes were written for each interview. All participants signed a UNSW Human Research Ethics' Committee Participant Information Statement and Consent Form prior to the interview.

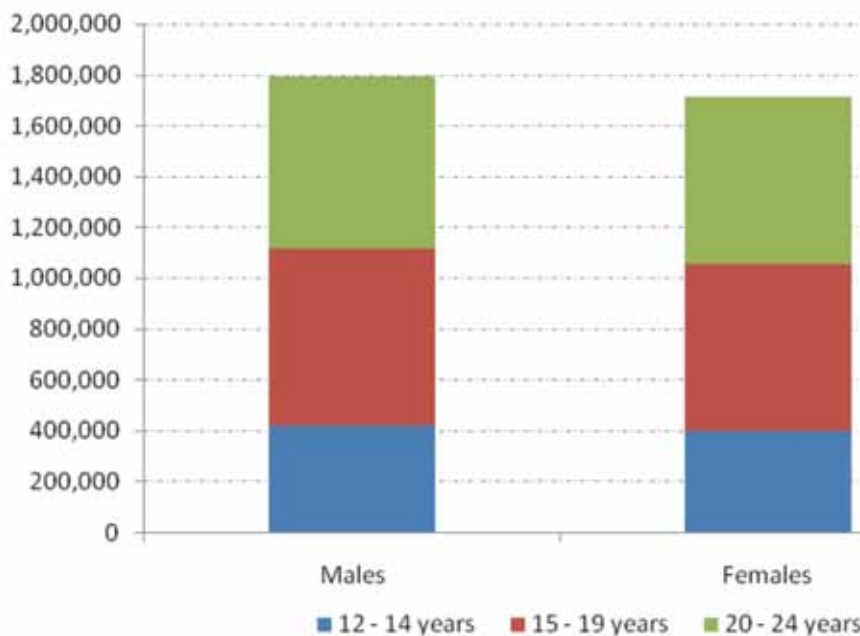
4 Who are Australia's young people?

To develop an understanding of young people 12–24 years in Australia, it is important to understand their broad demographics. How many young people live in Australia? Where do they live? Who do they live with? What is their cultural background? Are they religious? What do they feel strongly about? What are young people's hopes, aspirations and concerns? This section answers these demographic and aspirational questions.

4.1 How many young people live in Australia?

Young people 12–24 years account for almost one in five of the Australian population (approximately 3.5 million persons). Figure 4.1 shows that there are slightly more young men than young women. The difference is largest among young people aged 15–19 years.

Figure 4.1: Number of young men and women 12–14 years, 15–19 years, and 20–24 years in Australia

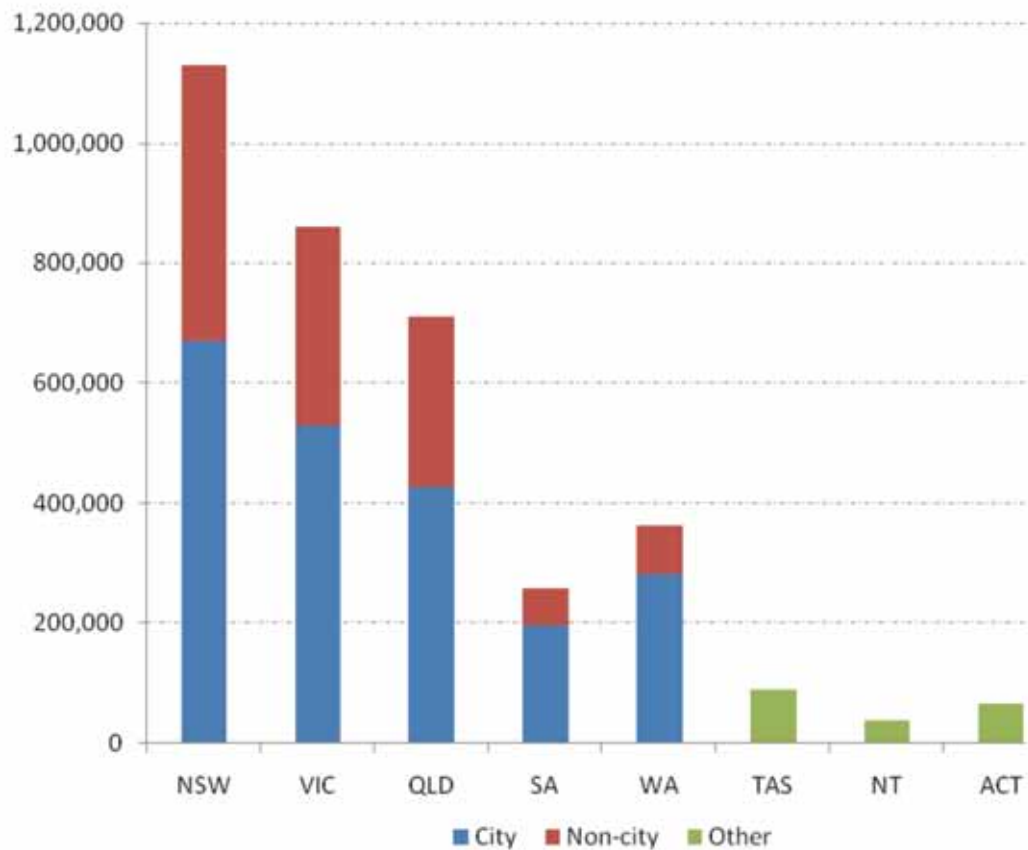


Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

4.2 Where in Australia do young people live?

The distribution of young people 12–24 years across the eight states and territories of Australia mirrors the distribution of rest of the population, meaning that young people are proportionately represented around the country (see Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Number of young people 12–24 years by Australian state and territory



Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Young people are most likely to live in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria or Queensland. Across the five most populated states, around two-thirds of all young people live in metropolitan areas. In NSW, Victoria and Queensland, approximately 60 per cent of young people live in metropolitan areas, compared to about three-quarters of all young people in both South Australia and Western Australia.

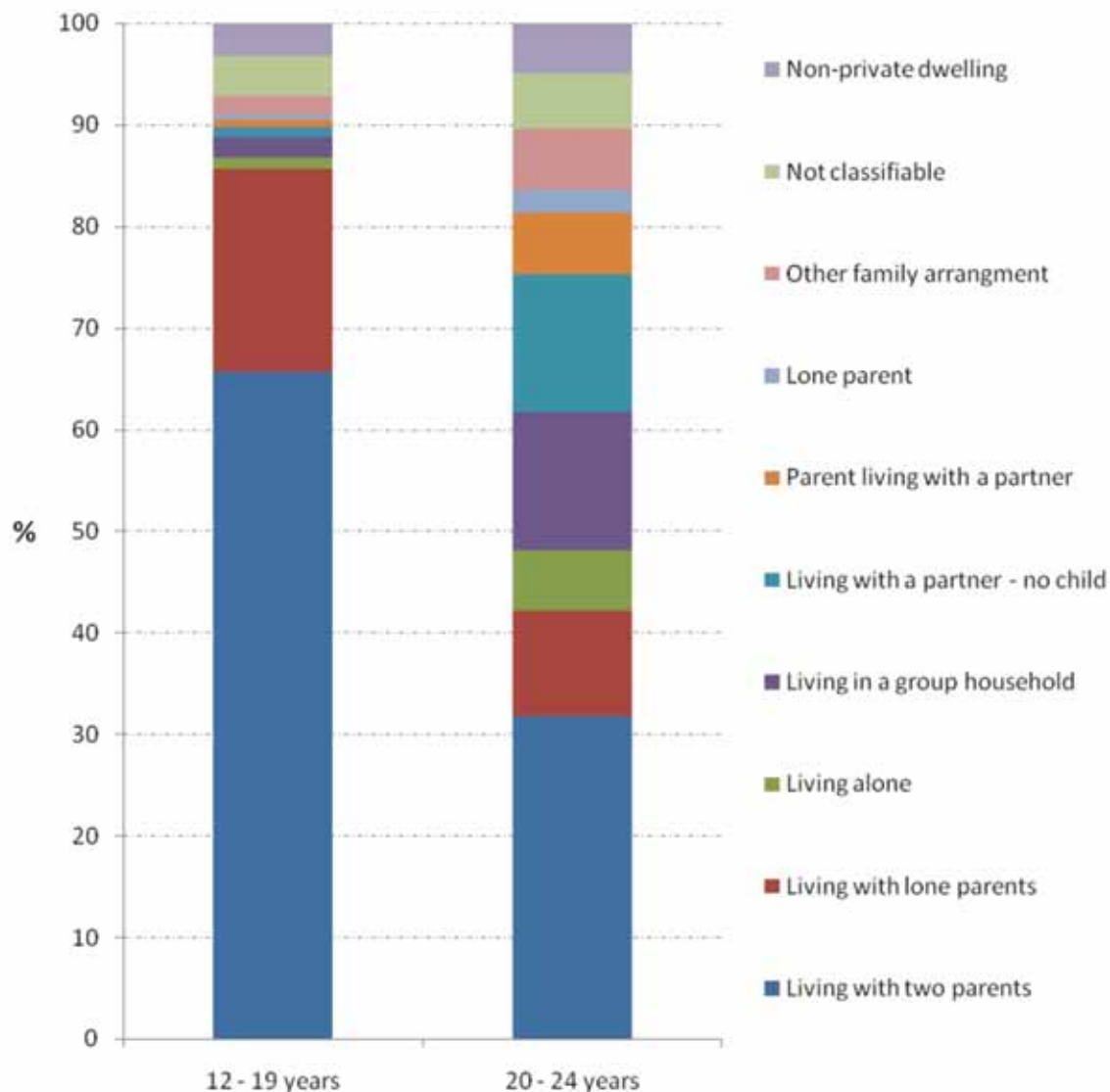
4.3 Who do young people live with?

About 2.8 million households in Australia contain a young person 12–24 years, which is about 28 per cent of all households. Most young Australians live with their parents, but living arrangements differ dramatically for young people in their early twenties. Figure 4.3 shows the proportion of young people living in varying situations.

Two in three 12–19-year-olds live at home with two parents (66%), and a further 20 per cent live with one parent. In contrast, a much lower proportion of young people aged 20–24 years live at home with two parents (32%), with a further 10 per cent living with a lone parent.

As Figure 4.3 shows, young people in their early twenties are a disparate group with respect to their living arrangements. About 6 per cent live alone and a further 14 per cent live in shared group households. A further 14 per cent of young people 20–24 years reside in couple households with no children. A small proportion of young people living in a household with their partner and child/ren (6%) or alone with their child/ren (2%).

Figure 4.3: Living arrangements of young people 12–24 years in Australia



Source: Authors' calculations, ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

It is important to recognise that young people are likely to be transient in their living arrangements. Young people, for example, may move from living with family, to living with friends, flatmates and/or a partner over a small number of years. Other young people may leave the family home only to return again. These situations were described by the young people in the focus groups:

I shifted back home last week. ... I was living with three friends. The six month lease was up and everyone decided to head back home because of money and stuff. (Male, 18-21-years)

Rented, mortgaged or owned outright homes

Almost half of all young people (45%) live in owner-occupied mortgaged homes. A further 22 per cent live in homes which are owned outright. The remaining 33 per cent live in rented accommodation.

The tenure type young people live in is largely determined by who they live with. As Table 4.1 shows, three-quarters of young people 12–24 years who live in a owner-occupied accommodation with a mortgage live with both their parents (approximately 1 million young people), and a further 14 per cent live with a lone parent.

Just under half of all young people living in lone parent households live in rental accommodation. This compares to 15 per cent of young people living with both parents. The young people most likely to be living in rental accommodation are those who live in group households (82%). Similar proportions of young people living alone and young people living with a partner (both with and without children) are living in rental accommodation (approximately 60%). This may reflect difficulties experienced by young people and young families in attempting to get established in the property market.

Table 4.1: Living arrangement and tenure status of young people 12–24 years in Australia

Living arrangement	Own outright	Mortgage	Rent	Total ¹
Living with two parents	517,800	1,027,600	278,800	1,824,200
Living with lone parents	99,200	192,600	264,300	556,100
Living alone	13,200	20,400	63,400	97,000
Living in a group household	7,100	23,400	184,700	215,200
Parent with a partner	7,200	64,600	126,900	198,700
Living with a partner - with child	5,700	31,500	55,800	93,000
Lone parent	1,400	4,400	32,400	38,200
Total ²	651,600	1,364,500	1,006,300	3,022,400

Source: Authors' calculations, ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

1 Row total excludes young people in some other tenure type, not stated or living in non-private dwelling.

2 Column total excludes young people in other family arrangements, not classifiable or living in non-private dwelling.

As can be seen from who young people live with, most young people (79 per cent) are remaining in the parental home at least until they are 24 years of age. This may be a result of delayed departure from full-time education, but it is also associated with broader patterns of increasing financial dependency (Cobb-Clark, 2008) and high housing costs (Flatau et al., 2007). Cobb-Clark (2008) suggests that by living in the parental home, adult children can maintain their consumption levels.

Flatau et al., (2007) also found that education, family background and ethnicity are strongly related to decisions to leave the parental home. They found that young people living in crowded parental homes or homes where parents were mostly absent were likely to leave prior to turning 24 years. Contrarily, those born in non-English speaking countries, those whose first language was other than English and those who went to a Catholic school tend to be less likely to leave the parental home prior to 24 years of age.

For young people who participated in the focus groups and who had a sound relationship with their parents, there was little urgency to leave home. The parental home provided them with domestic (meals, washing and cleaning), emotional and financial support. For some young people, it was also a place where luxuries were available that they could not afford if they moved out of home.

These advantages were balanced with young people wanting to become increasingly independent:

Living at home is good because you have all your washing and cooking done for you and you can save money. The bad thing is having someone in your ear all the time. (Female, 18–21-years)

You want the best of both worlds. You want to be independent, but at the same time you want someone to look after you. (Male, 22–24-years)

For many young people in the focus groups, the family home represented ‘a comfort zone and a security blanket’. It was also a place where most young people could return home if they needed to (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009).

Homelessness

A number of stakeholders, including young people who took part in the focus groups, raised homelessness among young people as a key area for concern. Homelessness is defined as both absolute (e.g. living on the streets) and relative (e.g. in temporary or emergency accommodation or living in boarding house).

Homeless young people often face multiple disadvantages such as poverty, poor access to health care, low educational participation and poor employment prospects (the Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2008). Homelessness is also linked to family conflict, violence and abuse, social isolation, substance abuse and mental health problems (DEECD, 2008; Chamberlain et al., 2007; Grace et al., 2008; Johnston and Chamberlain, 2008).

How many young people are homeless and which young people are more likely to be homeless?

Approximately 32,444 young people aged 12–24 years were homeless on census night in 2006, accounting for 31 per cent of all homeless people (see Table 4.2). This equates to almost one in every hundred young person.

Table 4.2: Homeless people aged 12–24 years, 2006

Age	Total	Percentage of total homelessness (%)	Female %	Male %
12–18 years	21940	21	54	46
19–24 years	10504	10	47	53
A 12–24 years	32444	31	52	48
All homeless	104676	100	44	56

Source: ABS Census, SAAP Client Collection and National Census of Homeless School Students 2006 in Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2009.

12–18-year-olds accounted for a higher proportion of homeless people than 19–24-year-olds. It is also interesting to note that among 12–18-year-olds, females comprised a higher proportion of homeless people than males. Indigenous young people and young refugees also face a higher risk of homelessness than other young people (ABS, 2006a; Boese and Scutella, 2006).

Falling into and out of homelessness

DEECD (2008) found that homelessness is relatively short-term for some young people, but other young people become ‘chronically homeless.’ Furthermore, the younger and longer people are homeless, the more difficult it becomes for them to move out of homelessness (Chamberlain et al., 2007).

Appropriate support can reduce the risk of long-term homelessness and its related disadvantages. In 2006–07, 15–24-year-olds comprised 39,300 Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)¹ clients, approximately 33 per cent of all SAAP clients (AIHW, 2008b). An additional 18,700 10–17-year-olds were also supported by SAAP as children who accompanied their parent(s) or guardian(s) (AIHW, 2008b).

Research addressing the barriers and facilitators for young people transitioning out of homelessness has identified stability, relationships and service provision as key issues. Wilks et al., (2008) found that young people emphasised emotional stability (such as relationships) over material stability (such as accommodation). Relationships can inspire young people to achieve a more secure lifestyle and impact on feelings of acceptance and support. Provision of stable accommodation was found to support emotional security, social inclusion and self-worth and respect. However, willingness to stay in the accommodation provided was affected by affordability, cleanliness, environment and location. Wilks et al., (2008) also found that homeless young people perceive that they have a sense of autonomy and independence, which may impact on how they cope with situations of authority and the housing situations they are willing to take-up.

4.4 How culturally diverse are young people?

Indigenous young people

The proportion of Indigenous young people is high compared to the broader population. Indigenous people account for 2.5 per cent of the Australian population, but Indigenous young people represent 3.6 per cent of all 15–19-year-olds and 2.8 per cent of all young people 20–24 years.

Place of birth

Four out of five young people were born in Australia. Of the one in five born overseas, most were born in Asia (6.6%) followed by Europe (2.6%; Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Country of birth for young people 12–24 years in Australia

Country of birth	Number	Percentage
Australia	2,797,000	79.8
NZ and Oceania	69,900	2.0
Asia	231,500	6.6
Europe	91,200	2.6
Africa	64,600	1.8
Americas	22,500	0.6
Not known	230,500	6.6
Total	3,507,200	100.0

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Language spoken at home

Most young people (79%) speak English at home. The remaining young people speak an Asian language (10%), another European language (4%), or another language² at home (Table 4.4). The proportions of young people who speak an Asian or European language are higher than the proportion of young people who were born in these countries. This is likely to be a result of second generation Australians speaking their parent's first language.

¹ SAAP aims to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services to help homeless people achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence (AIHW, 2008).

² The specific languages are unknown.

As expected, those born in Australia are most likely to speak English at home (91%). Young people born overseas are most likely to speak an Asian language at home (35%), followed by English (29%; Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Country of birth and language spoken at home for young people 12–24 years in Australia

Language spoken at home	Born overseas	Born in Australia	Total
English	207,500	2,550,700	2,758,200
Other European	51,600	85,500	137,100
Asian	246,400	118,700	365,100
Other	19,800	15,900	35,700
Unknown	184,900	26,200	211,100
Total	710,200	2,797,000	3,507,200

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

4.5 What are young people’s hopes, aspirations and concerns?

I’ll have a stable family life, a good relationship with my wife and my kids. It will be chilled. We’ll own our home and a couple of cars ... have a good job, not something boring but something I’d be happy doing. (15–17-year-old male)

As part of understanding who Australia’s young people are, it is useful to get a sense of their broad hopes, aspirations and concerns. The focus groups conducted by Shanahan and Elliott (2009) showed that young people are generally characterised by confidence and optimism. They were overwhelmingly confident about their own future. While young people discussed challenges that life had already presented and challenges they foresaw in the future, most strongly believed that they would succeed.

For most focus group respondents, short-term hopes centred on specific goals, such as successfully completing secondary or tertiary education; obtaining employment in their preferred industry; or taking time out (in the form of a ‘gap year’, or travelling). Young people’s long-term goals were frequently emotional as well as economic. They most commonly aspired to be happy and to live a life with few regrets. While some young people hoped to acquire great wealth and aspired to owning large homes and expensive cars, respondents overwhelmingly desired a ‘comfortable’ standard of living rather than extreme wealth. Many respondents believed that financial success and luxury were a potential ‘bonus’ of a successful, fulfilling career rather than an end in themselves. Young people overwhelmingly aspired to a balanced life: a happy relationship; secure, rewarding employment; a ‘comfortable’ standard of living; and, in many cases, children (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009).

The young people who took part in the focus groups highly valued family relationships, friendships, their health and independence.³ They were also enthusiastic about computers, communication technology, sport and having fun (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009).

Issues identified as being of greatest concern to young people in both the focus group and the survey of 625 young people (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009) were related to the economy. Without prompting, young people were most likely to report being concerned about the economy (22%) and employment (21%). This was followed by health and education (both 15%); environment (11%); and violence (7%); (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009). These concerns were quite different to those identified by respondents of Mission Australia’s National Survey of Young Australians a year earlier. Respondents to this latter survey largely identified health and social issues, such as body image, drugs, family conflict, suicide and personal safety (Mission Australia, 2008). The differences are likely to be related to the global economic crisis and media focus.⁴

³ Similar to findings from the 2008 Mission Australia survey.

⁴ They may also be influenced by fact that Mission Australia’s survey provided specific prompts for young people to respond to.

4.6 Conclusion

Young people (12–24 years) make up one in five of the Australian population. They are most likely to live in cities in the parental home. Of some concern is that almost one in every hundred young person is homeless. Young people are fairly culturally and linguistically diverse with a high proportion of Indigenous young people (compared to the total population), one in five young people born overseas, and one in five speaking a language other than English at home. Despite having some concerns about the economic climate, young people are generally confident and optimistic about their own future and have short-term and long-term goals.

Key points: who are Australia's young people?

- One in five Australians are 12–24 years of age
- In the five most populated states between 60 and 75 per cent of young people live in metropolitan areas
- 28 per cent of all households contain a young person
- Two in three 12–19-year-olds live at home with two parents (66%), and a further 20 per cent live with one parent.
- Less than one in three 20–24-year-olds live at home with two parents (32%), with a further 10 per cent living with a lone parent.
- Young people in their early twenties who are not living with parents are either living in shared households (14%), with a partner and/or children (14%) or alone (6%)
- Almost half of all young people (45%) live in owner-occupied mortgaged homes. A further 22 per cent live in homes which are owned outright.
- 33 per cent live in rented accommodation. These young people are most likely to be living in group households or with a partner.
- Most (79%) young people remain in the parental home at least until they are 24 years of age.
- Almost one in every hundred young people aged 12–24 years were homeless on census night in 2006.
- 12–18-year-olds are more likely to be homeless than 19–24-year-olds. Female 12–18-year-olds, Indigenous young people and young refugees also face a higher risk of homelessness.
- Indigenous people account for 3.6 per cent of all 15–19-year-olds and 2.8 per cent of all young people 20–24 years.
- One in five young people were born overseas – mostly in Asia (6.6%) or Europe (2.6%).
- One in five speak a language other than English at home – mostly an Asian language (10%) or another European language (4%).
- Young people are generally confident and optimistic about their own future. They have short-term (e.g. education, employment, travel) and long-term goals that are generally characterised by a balance between happiness, establishing their own families, employment and financial security. Young people, however, are concerned about the economy, their future employment prospects and/or employment stability.

5 Education

It's very important to get a good education. If you finish Year 12 there are more opportunities out there for you. (Male, 15–17 years)

I hate it but you've got to get the education. You've got to try and get somewhere.
(Male, 15–17 years)

Education is one of the most important dimensions of young people's lives because it can determine future opportunities and outcomes (Becker, 1975). It is also an area young people focus much of their time and effort on. Furthermore, education was one of the areas of critical importance for young people most commonly cited by key stakeholders, and noted as an area of great importance and concern by young people themselves.

This section uses both the 2006 Census and HILDA to examine how many young people are in education and the education levels of young people who have left education. It also explores which groups of young people do not fare as well in educational attainment and achievement.

5.1 How many young people are in education?

The 2006 Census found that almost two in three young people 12–24 years (approximately 63%, 2.2 million persons) were engaged in some form of education. Almost half of all young people were in secondary school (43%), one in five were enrolled in Tertiary education, and 6 per cent were in Vocational Education and Training (VET) (Table 5.1). Similar to this, the Longitudinal Survey of Australia Youth (LSAY) found that just over half (55.3%) of young people aged 17.7 years were in Year 12 and 36.4 per cent were not in education at all. Just over 10 per cent were currently undertaking VET, including apprenticeships and traineeships (LSAY, 2009).

Table 5.1: Proportion of all young people 12–24 enrolled in education by age and level (per cent)

	12–14 years %	15–19 years %	20–24 years %	12–24 years %
Secondary	100	50	1	43
VET	-	8	8	6
Tertiary	-	10	22	20
Unknown	-	3	2	2
Total	100	71	32	63

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Of the young people who were enrolled in education, approximately two-thirds were in secondary education, one in five were in tertiary education and one in ten were at VET. As expected, young people between 15–19 years of age were most likely to be in secondary school (71% of 15–19-year-olds who were studying). Young adults (20–24 years) were most likely to be participating in tertiary education (69% of those studying) (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2: Education level of young people enrolled in study by age (per cent)

	12–14 years %	15–19 years %	20–24 years %	12–24 years %
Secondary	100	71	2	68
VET		11	24	10
Tertiary		14	69	20
Unknown		4	5	3
Total		100	100	100

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

5.2 What education level have young people reached when they leave education?

Of the young people 12–24 years not enrolled in study (approximately 1.1 million), two-thirds had completed Year 12 (27%), attained a VET certificate (27%), or completed a university degree (12%). One in five of the young people 15–24 years who were no longer engaged in education, however, had only reached Year 10 or below (Table 5.3).

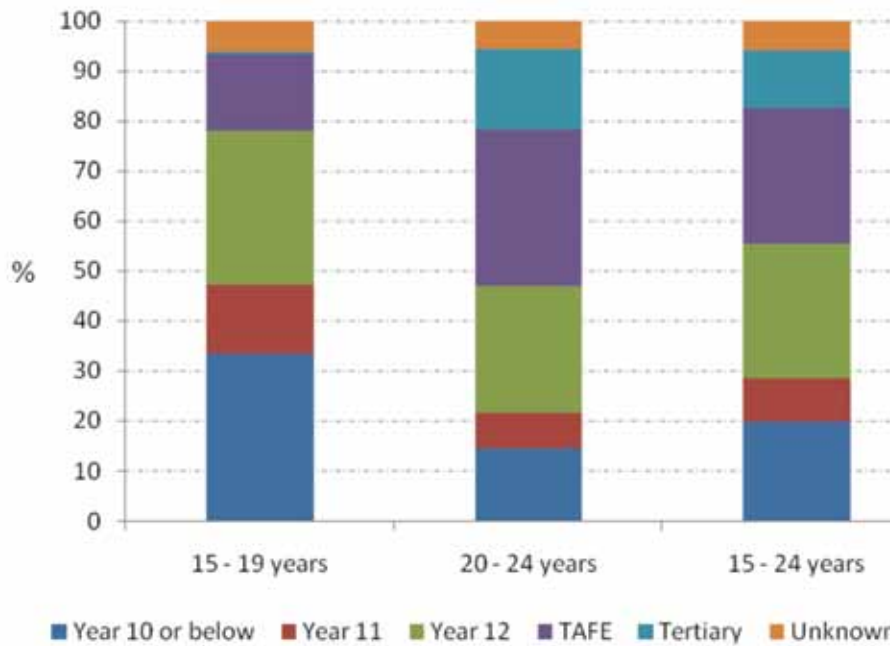
Table 5.3: Educational attainment of young people 15–19 and 20–24 years who are not enrolled in education in Australia

	15–19 years		20–24 years		15–24 years	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Year 10 or below	101,900	33	115,200	14	217,100	20
Year 11	41,500	14	55,200	7	96,700	9
Year 12	93,700	31	202,000	25	295,700	27
VET	47,300	16	250,400	31	297,700	27
Tertiary	1,200	0	127,700	16	128,900	12
Unknown	19,000	6	45,000	6	64,000	6
Total	304,600	100	795,500	100	1,100,100	100

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Around 600,000 young people 15–24 years (55% of young people who had completed education) had not progressed further than secondary school. Of these, about half did not complete Year 12. Unsurprisingly, 15–19-year-olds had lower levels of educational achievement than their 20–24-year-old counterparts (33% of 15–19-year-olds had only completed Year 10 or below, compared to 14 per cent of 20–24-year-olds; Table 5.3). The differences in educational attainment by age can be seen in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Educational attainment of young people who are not enrolled in education in Australia by age (15–19 and 20–24 years; per cent)



Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

The educational attainment of young people 15–19 years and 20–24 years, suggests that while some 15–19-year-olds are currently disengaged from education, they may return to education for further qualifications in the 20–24-year age bracket. In many cases, young people who do not complete Year 12 or begin tertiary studies before the age of 20 go on to do so at a later stage as work and life experiences may lead to greater desire for educational qualifications or increased appreciation of the benefits of formal qualifications. It is therefore important that the structures are in place to enable young people to access affordable educational qualifications (including an equivalent Year 12 certificate) between the ages of 20–24 years.

5.3 How does the level and quality of education in Australia compare internationally?

Australian young people are highly educated on the whole. In 2004, Australia was above the OECD average in relation to years of formal education and the proportion of the population with tertiary qualifications (AIHW, 2007). Literacy and numeracy levels of young people are also high. Australia’s results in the 2006 PISA⁵ survey of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds were above the OECD average in scientific, reading and mathematical literacy (Thomson and De Bortoli, 2008). In 2008, the vast majority of students in Year 7 (aged around 12–13 years) met the national benchmarks set by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) for reading (94%), writing (92%) and numeracy (95%) (MCEEDYA, 2008).

⁵ The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey provides regular information on educational outcomes within and across countries. It was first carried out in 2000 and is repeated every three years. In 2006 students from all OECD countries and 27 partner countries (57 countries) took part – <http://www.acer.edu.au/ozpisa/reports.html>.

5.4 Which young people do not fare well in education?

Although Australian young people are largely well educated, not all young people have done equally well. There are a number of demographic characteristics which can impact on educational outcomes. These include sex, geographic location, socio-economic status (SES), and Indigeneity.

Difference between the sexes

Females are more likely to complete Year 12 and to perform better in regard to reading and writing, than their male counterparts. Throughout the period 1981 to 2006, school retention rates to Year 12 across Australia have been consistently higher for females than for males, and in 2006, the apparent retention rate⁶ to Year 12 was 12 percentage points higher for females than for males: 81 per cent for females and 69 per cent for males. Furthermore, in 2008, there were statistically significant differences between the proportions of males and females meeting the Year 7 MCEETYA benchmarks for reading (93% and 96% respectively) and writing (87% and 95% respectively), although there was no difference between the sexes in the numeracy benchmark (both 95%; (MCEECDYA, 2008).

Geographic location

Young people in rural and remote areas are at an educational disadvantage – in terms of attainment, performance and participation – in comparison with their counterparts in urban areas. In 2004, the Year 12 completion rate in metropolitan areas was 70 per cent and 63 per cent in regional areas, compared to 54 per cent in remote areas. In 2008, students in remote areas were also less likely than those in metropolitan areas to meet the Year 7 MCEETYA benchmarks for reading (84% compared with 95%), writing (81% compared with 93%), and numeracy (88% compared with 96%) (MCEECDYA, 2008). Moreover, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is widest in rural and remote areas (Long and North, 2009: 26), which demonstrates compounding factors of disadvantage.

The poorer educational outcomes of young Australians in rural and remote areas have also been recognised internationally. A 2002 UNICEF report on educational disadvantage in wealthy countries found that, whereas Australia was ranked in the top ten countries in relation to students who lived in urban areas, in relation to its rural and regional students Australia was ranked 25th out of 40 countries (Cashmore and Townsend, 2006: 13).

Many of the young people in the focus groups from remote and regional areas felt that they were disadvantaged in terms educational participation. Some of the young people felt that they were disadvantaged in relation to subject choice compared to their urban counterparts – many subjects are only offered via distance education or not at all:

You're also more restricted in your subject selection. You have to go with what the majority wants out here. There's only a certain number of teachers and they're qualified to teach certain subjects. (Female, 15–17 years, rural)

In our school we had a few subjects taken off the list because there weren't enough interest in it, so they couldn't supply a teacher. So if you wanted to do it you couldn't, tough, pick something else. (Female, 15–17 years, rural)

Access to education was also challenging for young people in rural or remote areas. Many of the young people in these areas reported travelling large distances to educational institutions, particularly VET and university, which was often expensive despite assistance received from the government:

⁶ The apparent retention rate is calculated by dividing the number of students in Year 12 in any one year by the number of students who started their secondary schooling in the year the Year 12 students did, and converting it to a percentage. This rate is 'apparent' because it does not include those who interrupt their school career and return to finish Year 12 at a later date, or those who repeat a year, or any other changes within a school population cohort (AIHW, 2007:119).

I travel away for a week every 5 weeks for TAFE [VET] in Dubbo. There is the cost side of things. I'm still paying rent for the house in town while I'm away and the accommodation when I'm in Dubbo. You get a small amount of assistance but it doesn't cover everything. (Male, 18–21 years, rural)

That's one of the disadvantages of being in the country, you have to move to go to uni. The younger you are, the harder it is to move away from your parents, to live by yourself and struggle to go to uni, struggle to pay everything. I know I wouldn't have been able to handle it. (Female, 18–21 years, rural)

These quotes show that geographic location can impact on young people's educational opportunities and their decisions to continue on to tertiary education.

Socio economic status (SES)

Australia is not doing well in meeting the educational needs of children and young people from low socio economic backgrounds (Cashmore and Townsend, 2006). They were twice as likely as students from high SES backgrounds to underperform in tests of literacy and numeracy, and more likely to dislike school, to truant, to be suspended or expelled, and to leave school early (Cashmore and Townsend, 2006; Boese and Scutella, 2006: 15–17). In 2004, for example, the Year 12 completion rate for school students living in areas in the bottom three-tenths of the SES scale was 59 per cent, whereas the completion rate for students living in areas in the top three-tenths was 79 per cent (AIHW, 2008c:122).⁷ Young people from low SES backgrounds are also less likely to continue with education after they leave school (Cashmore and Townsend, 2006; Boese and Scutella, 2006: 15–17).

Not surprisingly, financial pressure can be an important factor influencing young people from low SES backgrounds not to continue with study (Misson, 2008). Education in Australia is not truly free in the sense of requiring no financial input from parents, and even minimal costs can be a barrier to continuing education for some young people (Kamp and Horn, 2008: 7). Many of the costs relate to 'extras' – participation in school activities such as sports, excursions, social events, 'fun days' (Cashmore and Townsend, 2006). The costs of multiple sports uniforms, trips and fees can be an impossible burden for families already struggling with the basic costs of educating their children (Thomson, 2005).

The affordability of additional study after leaving school was a key issue for young people in the focus groups (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009). Many of the young people felt that they would be excluded from additional study in future due to the costs, particularly if their parents were not able to provide some financial support:

I want to go to uni but I'm not sure I can afford it. My parents can't help me much, so I'll probably take a gap year to try and earn some money so I can go. (Male, 15–17 years, metropolitan)

Money is going to be a big thing. It's pretty expensive to go away to uni. (Female, 15–17 years, rural)

The effects of low SES may be countered by addressing affordability and increasing school engagement. One study of student engagement⁸ found that the influence of SES was small compared with that of whole-school engagement (Thomson, 2005). Participation in extracurricular activities helps students to develop a sense of belonging in the sense that they recognise the school as an important part of their own lives. This is especially the case for students from low socio economic backgrounds or for those who are low achievers, because feeling as though one belongs can promote self-worth and help develop resilience (Thomson, 2005). Furthermore, a focus on relationships, respect and a broad consensus between students from disadvantaged areas and teachers has also been found to improve engagement (Smyth and Fasoli, 2007).

⁷ Moreover, the completion rate for the bottom three-tenths was lower than the national average (68%).

⁸ Defined in terms of school provision of extracurricular activities and student participation in them.

Overall, young people from higher SES backgrounds have better educational outcomes. Thus, as the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) noted, for the federal government's target of a 90 per cent Year 12 completion rate by 2020 to be achieved, policies will need to improve rates of educational attainment for young people from low SES backgrounds (Lamb and Mason, 2008). This impact of socio economic status on education may be a major contributor for poorer educational outcomes of Indigenous young people (Boese and Scutella, 2006: 15).

Indigenous young people

Indigenous young people have poorer educational attainment and achievement compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. They are less likely to have completed Year 12, they have lower participation rates in education at secondary and tertiary levels, and they have poorer attendance rates and performance.

Just under one-quarter of Indigenous 15–19-year-olds not currently attending school and one-third of 20–24-year-olds have completed Year 12 (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009). Indigenous people aged 15–29 years are less likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to have completed Year 12 or to have a post-school qualification (DSF, 2009: 4). Current enrolment in education is also lower for Indigenous young people. Just over half (54%) of all Indigenous 15–19-year-olds are enrolled in education compared to 76 per cent of non-Indigenous young people in the same age bracket (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009). Long et al., (1998) have suggested that these lower retention rates were related to a lack of courses relevant to Indigenous youth; a lack of cultural appropriateness in curriculum, teaching and assessment; and low literacy levels.

In addition to having lower secondary-school retention and completion rates, Indigenous young people fare poorly in reading, science and maths results compared to all Australian young people. In comparison with 15-year-olds in other countries, Australian 15-year-olds were ranked 6th out of 29 countries in their reading ability, but 29th out of 30 countries in the case of Indigenous 15-year-olds. There were similar disparities in the abilities of Australians in general and Indigenous Australians in the case of maths and science (Table 5.4; PISA results, ARACY 2008b).

Table 5.4: OECD ranking for reading, maths and science for Australian 15-year-olds and Indigenous 15-year-olds

	All Australian 15yr olds	Indigenous 15yr olds
Reading	6/29	29/30
Maths	8/30	29/31
Science	5/30	29/31

Source: ARACY, 2008b, p.8 of 24⁹

According to information from the MCEETYA 2004 *National Report on Schooling*, in recent years there has been some improvement in the proportion of Indigenous students achieving the national benchmarks in reading. Between 2001 and 2004, the proportion achieving the Year 7 reading benchmarks increased from 60 per cent to 71 per cent. However, the proportion achieving the numeracy benchmarks remained around 50 per cent, and despite the improvements in reading, the proportion of Year 7 Indigenous students who met the benchmarks remained much lower than for Australian students overall. Still, the gap in Year 7 reading achievements between Indigenous students and Australian students in general did narrow between 2001 and 2004, by eight percentage points (to 20 percentage points in 2004) (ABS, 2006a: 97. See also: Thomson, 2005; Smyth and Fasoli, 2007; Mission Australia, 2008).

⁹ The only source given for this information is 'OECD'. It can be assumed that these are rankings of PISA scores, since these are mentioned in the full report (ARACY, 2008a: 72), although the full report does not include this particular information.

The low overall academic performance of Indigenous young people has been attributed to degrees of geographical remoteness, emotional or behavioural difficulties, parents' educational attainment and school attendance (ABS, 2006: 98–100). While it is difficult to get consistent figures, daily attendance at school of Indigenous students is lower than that of Australian students overall. Based on school reporting (required under the federal government's Indigenous Education Programme), the median rate of Indigenous attendance at state secondary school was 74 per cent, compared with 89 per cent for non-Indigenous students (Long and North, 2009: 37-8, 39-40).

The educational gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people persists and increases among young adults. The proportion of non-Indigenous 20–24-year-olds in post-secondary education (35%) is just over twice as great as the proportion for Indigenous young people 20–24 years (14%) (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009). The largest difference is apparent in university enrolment. About 6 per cent of Indigenous young people are enrolled in a university (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009), which compares unfavourably with the figure of 20 per cent for non-Indigenous young people 20-24 years.

In general, Indigenous students therefore still fare significantly worse than non-Indigenous students both in school achievement and in the transition to post compulsory education.

What's changed for young people in relation to education?

The proportion of young people who have completed Year 12 has been increasing over time. In 2008, approximately 84 per cent of 20–24-year-olds had completed Year 12 (or equivalent). Young women were more likely than young men to have completed Year 12 (or equivalent) (87% compared to 81%; ABS, 2008a).¹⁰ One author referred to the rise in school completion rates in recent decades in Australia as 'dramatic', pointing out that only about 30 per cent of young people had completed school in the early 1980s (Marks, 2006: 3).

Since 1996, there has been a slow, steady increase in the proportion of Indigenous teenagers enrolled in secondary education and who have completed Year 12.¹¹ The proportion of Indigenous teenagers enrolled in school, for example, was only 35 per cent in 1996 (Long et al., 1998). Therefore the participation gap has and is narrowing, but it still persists. This links in with comments from Indigenous young people in the focus groups (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009) which recognise the importance of education for the future:

Everyone needs a good education (Male, 15–17 years, Indigenous).

It's [education] very important if you want to get a job and go somewhere in your life not being a bum and sitting around (Female, 15–17 years, Indigenous).

5.5 Conclusion

Education is of critical importance for young people's future outcomes. The majority of young people are currently in some form of education. For those who have left education, most had achieved Year 12, a VET qualification or a university degree. Overall, educational attainment has improved over time and Australia performs very well internationally. However, key groups of young people are at risk of poor educational attainment and performance. This is particularly the case for Indigenous Australians and young people from low SES backgrounds.

¹⁰ For figures for full-time study, see the report of the results of Mission Australia's seventh annual survey of young Australians conducted in 2008. The survey was completed by 45,558 young people aged 11 to 24 (Mission Australia, 2008: 8).

¹¹ While the proportion of Indigenous teenagers in full-time study in 1996 was 42 per cent, that had increased to 49 per cent by 2006 (Long and North, 2009: 6. See also: Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).

Key points: education

- The critical importance of education was emphasised by all stakeholders, including young people.
- In 2006, almost two-thirds of young people aged 12–24 years (around 63% or 2.2 million persons) were engaged in some form of education (43% in secondary school, 20% in tertiary education, and 6% in VET).
- Of those not enrolled in study in 2006 (around 1.1 million), two-thirds had either completed Year 12, attained a VET certificate, or completed a university degree.
- One in five young people 15–24 years who are not in education have only reached Year 10 or below.
- The proportion of young people who have completed Year 12 has been increasing over time. In 2008, 82 per cent of 20–24-year-olds had completed Year 12 (or equivalent).
- Australian young people are highly educated on the whole, with Australia above the OECD average in years of formal education and scientific, reading, writing and mathematical literacy.
- There are, however, some groups of young people at risk of low education levels, in particular, those from low socio economic backgrounds, Indigenous young people, and those living in rural and remote areas.
- In 2004 the Year 12 completion rate for school students living in areas in the bottom three-tenths of the SES scale was 59 per cent, compared to 79 per cent for the top three (AIHW, 2008c:122).
- Just over half (54%) of all Indigenous 15–19-year-olds are enrolled in education compared to 76 per cent of non-Indigenous young people in the same age bracket (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).
- Only one-quarter of Indigenous 15–19-year-olds not currently attending school and one-third of 20–24-year-olds have completed Year 12 (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).
- 14 per cent of Indigenous 20–24-year-olds are in post-secondary education, compared to 35 per cent of non-Indigenous 20–24-year-olds (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).

6 Employment and income

I've got a part time job, so I've got money to spend. (Female, 15–17 years)

The hard thing is that you need to know what you want to do. (Female, 15–17 years)

I have to get a grown up job now. (Female, 22–24 years)

I'm happy to go to work, I'm doing well in my job, got good colleagues ... and I'm respected.
(Male, 18–21 years)

These quotes from young people represent the diversity of stages 15–24-year-olds experience in regard to employment: from part-time, casual work for spending money to worrying about career choices and finding an employment niche. This section explores the employment situation of young people. It answers the key question: to what extent are young people working, looking for work or out of the labour force in Australia? It examines working hours, casualisation, occupation types and unemployment. This section of the report also briefly examines factors that assist young people in the transition from school to work and the challenges young people can face during their new introduction to the workplace.

6.1 To what extent are young people working, looking for work, or out of the labour force?

Almost half of all teenagers (44% of 15–19-year-olds) and over two-thirds (69%) of 20–24-year-olds are employed.¹² Males and females have similar overall participation rates: with 45 per cent of female 15–19-year-olds employed, compared to 43 per cent of males in the same age group, and 70 per cent of 20–24-year-old males employed compared to 67 per cent of females (Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1).

Table 6.1: Labour force participation of young people in Australia by age and gender

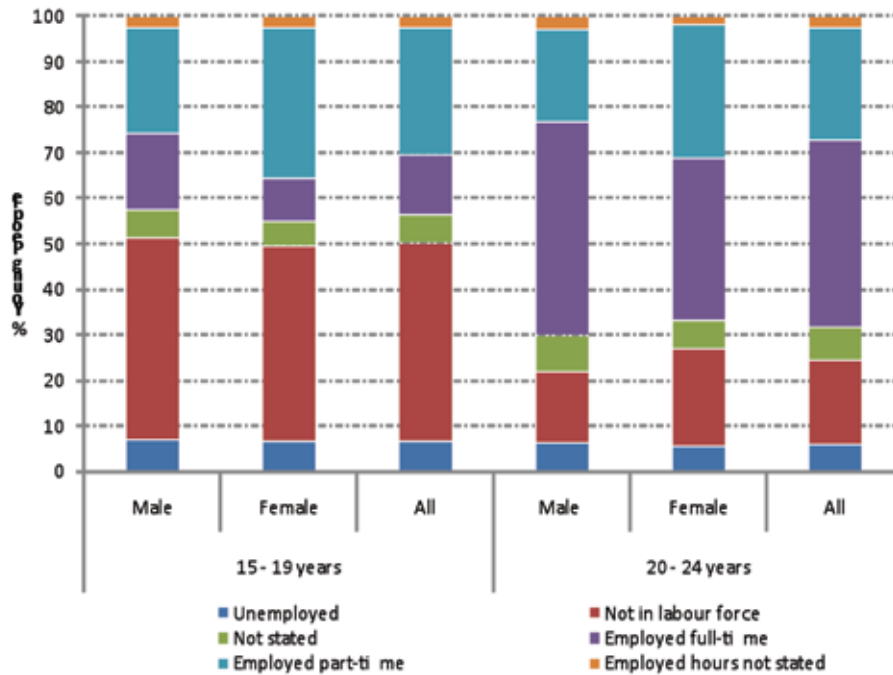
	15–19 years			20–24 years		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Employed full-time	17.0	9.4	13.3	46.7	35.7	41.3
Employed part-time	23.2	33.1	28.0	20.4	29.1	24.7
Employed hours not stated	2.5	2.5	2.5	3.0	2.0	2.5
Unemployed	6.8	6.4	6.6	6.2	5.5	5.8
Not in labour force	44.6	42.9	43.8	15.7	21.3	18.5
Not stated	6.0	5.6	5.8	8.0	6.4	7.2

Source: Author's calculations, ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

LSAY found that over 60% of 17.7 years olds (average age of respondents) were permanently employed, had ongoing employment or were employed casually (LSAY, 2009b).

¹² Young people less than 15 years are not included in the official labour force.

Figure 6.1: Labour force participation of young people in Australia by age and gender (per cent)



Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Employment rates vary for different groups of young people. Indigenous young people, for example, are less likely than all Australian young people to be employed, and the gap widens as teenagers become young adults. Fewer than one-third of Indigenous teenagers are employed (31%), in comparison with nearly 44 per cent of non-Indigenous 15–19-year-olds (see Table 6.1), while just under half (49%) of Indigenous young adults 20–24 years of age are employed (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009), in comparison with 69 per cent of non-Indigenous young adults.

Long et al., (1998) found evidence of high levels of participation of Indigenous youth in part-time, low-paid, insecure employment. This study also found that Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) provided employment for Indigenous young people in places where there would not otherwise be any employment opportunities (in accordance with the scheme’s original intentions). From this perspective, without CDEP, unemployment among Indigenous people would have been higher. However there are different views as to whether CDEP should be considered employment or a welfare program. CDEP has been criticised on a number of grounds, including that it has acted as a disincentive for young people to gain employment outside CDEP and has reinforced low employment expectations for Indigenous young people. These issues have been addressed over the years (although not always resolved), for example by requiring 15–17 year olds participating in CDEP to be undertaking accredited training. Any reforms to CDEP need to be cognisant of the problems of a segmented labour market and the limited employment opportunities in remote and very remote areas (Long and North, 2009: 55–7. See also: Hunter, 2001).¹³

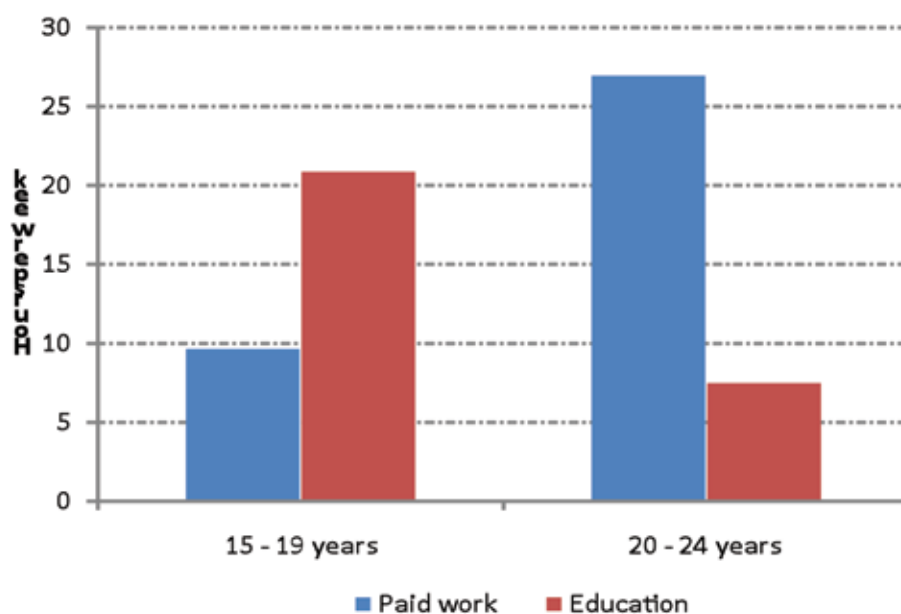
¹³ From 1 July 2009 CDEP has undergone changes. See <http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/services/cdep.htm>.

Working hours

As expected, the majority of teenagers are employed in a part-time capacity and young adults are more likely to be employed full-time. However, levels of part-time employment are high even among young people 20–24 years, where the incidence of part-time employment is around 25 per cent. The high prevalence of part-time employment among youth is due to the fact that many young people are simultaneously studying. In both age groups a higher proportion of young men are employed full-time, and a higher proportion of young women are employed part-time (Table 6.1 and Figure 6.1). This discrepancy may be explained by the fact that young women are more likely to be engaged in education or domestic work and caring than are young men.

Working teenagers (15–19 years of age) average a fairly small part-time load of 10 hours per week. This is to be expected, given that on average they are spending 21 hours per week in education (combining study and work is further discussed below). In contrast, young adults (20–24 years) average 27 hours in paid work and only 8 hours in education-related activities (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Average weekly hours per week young people 15–19 years and 20–24 years allocate to paid work and education



Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

For those working full-time, there is a small proportion working long hours. This is particularly the case for males. About one-tenth of all young men aged 15–24 years work for 50 hours or more, compared with 4 per cent of young women aged 15–24 years. This is consistent with the fact that Australia is internationally noted for its long working hours, especially for men (VanWanrooy et al., 2007).

The focus groups with young people (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009) showed that, in many cases, young people felt that they needed to work longer hours to impress their employers, particularly with the current shortage of employment opportunities:

I think the thing is that with people so uncertain in their jobs at the moment, even though you might not like your job, you know you have to keep it because there's nothing else there. I've seen people put in longer hours just to show that they are doing the work and for there to be a reason for the employer to keep them in their position. (Female, 22–24 years)

Robinson (1999) and Vickers, Lamb et al., (2003) found that high school students who undertook part-time work while at school were equally likely to complete Year 12 as students who did not work. However, they also pointed to a link between working more than five hours a week while at school and non-completion of Year 12, especially for males. There may be other confounding factors involved and so it is difficult to assess whether longer working hours have a causal effect on school non-completion rates.

Casual work

Young people are highly likely to be employed in casual positions, but females are far more likely than men to be employed casually at any age. Around 39 per cent of young men 15–24 years are employed on a casual basis, compared with 52 per cent of young women 15–24 years.¹⁴ Surprisingly, considering the high levels of casual employment, young people rated their job security very highly (8.2/10), but expressed a lower level of satisfaction with their pay (6.9/10), results which were very similar for working age adults (HILDA 2007). These results were collected in 2007 and should therefore be understood against a backdrop of sustained economic growth and prosperity.

The discussions in the recent focus groups with young people suggest an increasing anxiety about the security of casual jobs or finding casual work (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009):

As things [with the economy] get worse, casual jobs dry up and casual jobs are what uni students rely on to survive ... so at the moment I'm painfully, painfully poor and finding work at the moment is really hard. (Male, 18–21 years).

In rural locations, the availability of casual work was limited in regard to the number of jobs and the type of work available. Young females living in these areas were particularly frustrated about their options:

I'm having trouble finding work. In our town all you've got is to be a checkout chick if you are a female. (Female, 15–17 years)

There's more male jobs in this town than there is like female jobs. (Female, 15–17 years)

Occupations

The top three occupations for young men 15–24 years are technicians and trade workers (28% of all employed young men), labourers (22%) and sales workers (16%). The professions do not figure highly among young men, most likely because of the additional time in training that is required in professional occupations. For young women, the top occupations are sales workers (32% of all employed young women), community and personal services workers (19%), and clerical and administrative workers (19%), and professionals (11%) (ABS Census 2006).

Some of the young people that participated in the focus groups (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009) felt that their choice of occupation was limited based on their geographic location and gender. Many of the young people in rural and regional areas felt that they would either have to move out of the area to find a job of their choice or simply pick from what was available in their area:

You've got to travel over an hour to do anything ... or to have serious job opportunities.”
(Female, 15–17 years)

To get a good job, you have to move to the city or away from here, pretty much.
(Female, 15–17 years)

¹⁴ For the adult working age population (25–64 years) these proportions are 10 and 18 per cent for men and women respectively.

Unemployment

I just want anything that comes my way I just want to do something, not nothing.
(Female, 15–17 years)

It is important for young people entering the labour market to avoid unemployment, as evidence suggests that initial experiences of unemployment reduce the chances of subsequent full-time work – a phenomenon referred to as the ‘scarring effect’ of unemployment (Marks, 2005).

Unemployment has increased for young people as a result of the recent global economic crisis. The most recent seasonally adjusted unemployment for young people aged 15–24 years is 11.9 per cent (August 2009).¹⁵ This compares to 7.8 per cent in August 2008 (ABS, 2009b). Robinson and Lamb (2009: 9) found that the unemployment rate for teenagers who were not in full-time education increased substantially between 2008 and 2009 (from 12.2% to 18.5%).

Shanahan and Elliott (2009) found that the current state of the economy and the potential impact on unemployment is a concern for both employed and unemployed young people:

I’m unemployed at the moment, been unemployed for 7–8 months now. I was a labourer and with the recession I’m finding it hard to get back in. I’m starting a course next week doing welding and sheet metal and all that stuff just to keep occupied and get some more skills. (Male, 18–21 years)

I’m a bit concerned about my job now, work isn’t as busy. I don’t know what they’re going to do about our jobs. (Female, 15–17 years)

Some of the young people talked about the need to do more than their job required in order to stay employed:

I’m being a little bit more productive at work so I shine a little bit more than everyone else.
(Male, 18–21 years).

The young people quoted demonstrate real or perceived fears of unemployment, but not necessarily a lack of agency. Young people were gaining new skills and working hard to demonstrate their value. It is important that young people are supported, rather than blamed for their employment status.

Research on social policy addressing young people and unemployment suggests that young people have been blamed for their unemployed status in the past, even when the labour market has been unable to offer long-term, sustainable employment (Kerr and Savelsberg, 2002). Kerr and Savelsberg found that young people were often unable to meet activity requirements Mutual Obligation¹⁶ in place in 2002 for a variety of reasons beyond their own control.¹⁷ It is particularly important in the current economic climate that social policies addressing unemployment are flexible and do not unduly penalise young people. It is also important that existing disadvantage is not exacerbated.

As in the case with educational outcomes, socio economic status and Indigeneity once again have an influence on employment. Research in Victoria by the Brotherhood of St Laurence found that socio economic status clearly played a part in determining the destinations of young people after they had left school. Those with low SES background were more likely to become unemployed and less likely to go on to university. This was particularly the case for young women (Boese and Scutella, 2006).

¹⁵ It is important to note that this includes young people who are in education but also looking for work.

¹⁶ Since the late 1990s, the Australian Government has increasingly developed policies that emphasise mutual obligations between the government and recipients of income support, with new contractual arrangements for services including Work for the Dole (Kerr and Savelsberg, 2002).

¹⁷ Reported reasons for to meet failing to meeting Mutual Obligation activity requirements included illiteracy, homelessness, substance abuse, intellectual disability.

The unemployment rates for Indigenous young people were much higher than for other young people in Australia prior to the economic crisis. Dusseldorp Skills Forum (2009) reported that 26 per cent of Indigenous 15–19-year-olds and 19 per cent of 20–24-year-olds were unemployed.¹⁸

It is important that the current economic climate does not undermine previously declining unemployment rates of Indigenous young Australians over the last decade (Long and North, 2009). Among 15–19-year-olds, increases in educational participation may have contributed to reducing gaps in unemployment, particularly in capital cities and regional areas (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).

Despite employment discrepancies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, a higher proportion of Indigenous people (24%) said they highly valued getting a job, compared with non-Indigenous people (16%) in Mission Australia's (2008) survey. Shanahan and Elliott (2009) also found that Indigenous young people valued work. However, they also reported a number of barriers to employment such as, poor self-esteem, lack of appropriate qualifications, poor home and living conditions, a lack of mentors and role models and a lack of transport.

6.2 What helps young people move from education into work?

Career advice, work experience and vocational education and training can all play a role in assisting young people to move from education into work.

Career advice and work experience as part of the school curriculum are important parts of the Australian education system. In 2005, all students who participated in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Youth (LSAY) participated in at least one type of career advice activity across Years 10, 11 and 12.¹⁹ Almost all students (95%) received written careers advice material and handouts, while 87 per cent attended a talk from the school's career advisor. Members of the LSAY cohort were generally positive about the value of the career advice they received at school. An individual conversation with the career advisor was perceived as the most useful, with 60 per cent of Year 10 students stated the conversation was 'very useful'. Group discussion was seen as the least useful (Rothman and Hillman, 2008).

Regardless of sex, location or socio economic status, students reported career advice as useful. However, there was a small but statistically significant relationship between lower achievement scores and more positive comments about the usefulness of career advice. This underscores the importance of this advice for young people who are more vulnerable when making the transition from school (Rothman and Hillman, 2008).

The 2006 Census showed that those who completed school were more likely than early school leavers to get full-time work. In the year after leaving school, early leavers were twice as likely as school completers to be only marginally attached to the labour force (i.e. employed part-time or unemployed/not in the labour force) – 40 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. The May 2007 ABS *Education and Work* survey showed that completing Year 12 gave young people an advantage in the first year after leaving school, even when they did not proceed to further education. While around half the early school leavers were either unemployed or not in the labour force just after leaving school, only one-fifth of the Year 12 graduates were. In their seventh year post-school, almost a third of the early school leavers (32.6%) were only marginally attached to the labour force, compared with 20 per cent of Year 12 graduates (Lamb and Mason, 2008).

Vocational education and training (VET) in schools is often recommended as a way of easing the transition from school into the labour force. The last two FYA reports, for example, list VET along with post-school education and training (university study, VET and apprenticeships) as important in smoothing the transition to full-time work (Lamb and Mason, 2008; Robinson and Lamb, 2009). Most sources suggest that VET participation can lead to full-time work, particularly for those who take up apprenticeships and traineeships (Curtis, 2008; NCVET, 2007), but there is some debate (Marks 2005). Anlezark, Karmel, et al.,

¹⁸ These figures include young people engaged in education.

¹⁹ Most careers advice activity occurred in Year 10, when 99 per cent of students accessed at least one activity.

(2006) found that VET outcomes were mixed. They found that VET in schools assisted retention from Year 10 to Year 11, but not Year 11 to Year 12. They also found that it was particularly valuable in improving post-school outcomes for early school leavers and provided clear post-school pathways for some students, especially boys studying building and engineering. These findings suggest that VET is valuable, but that it might be further strengthened and/or that it might be complemented by other initiatives or programs to further increase school retention till the completion of Year 12.

On the basis of an analysis of the first eight waves of the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY), Marks (2005) found that there was no ‘crisis’ relating to the school-to-work transitions of young people who did not go on to university, despite pessimistic descriptions of the youth labour market in Australia in terms of casualisation, marginalisation and polarisation. In their fourth year after leaving school about 80 per cent of the young men and 70 per cent of the young women were in full-time work. It is true that there were some young people who experienced severe difficulties in moving into work from school, but they probably comprised less than 10 per cent of the school-leavers who did not go to university.

The LSAY analysis also found that part-time work was not a dead-end. Part-time workers often moved into full-time work, and they could have increases in job status and earnings even while remaining part-time. Part-time work while studying is also an important part of the education to full-time work transition (Kamp et al., 2008).

What is necessary for the health of the youth labour market is to keep unemployment as low as possible. The author cited the OECD noting that the key to successful school-to-work transitions was a healthy economy (Marks, 2005, 2006). Given the current economic climate, this will be a substantial challenge for governments and service providers.

6.3 What challenges do young people face when transitioning into the workplace?

A number of young people in the focus groups expressed concern about the transition from school or further study to work. They worried about what they were going to do and if they made the right decision:

Oh my God, it’s scary, leaving school. I don’t know if I’ve made the right decision.

(Female, 15–17 years)

What do I do with myself? There’s too many choices and options and figuring it out and making decisions, I think that’s the hardest thing. The biggest concern in my life is making decisions.

(Female, 15–17 years)

Even once young people had made a decision in regard to a career choice or further education, there was still often doubt about future employment options and decisions. While young people were mixed about the support they received from school career’s advisors, some young people who were no longer part of the education system felt at a loss as to where to seek career advice:

Now that I’m finished uni I’m a bit lost as to what path to take... I don’t feel that I’ve had enough experience in either one (strands of degrees) to decide what path I want to take in life and there’s not really that many people ... I know of [to talk to about it]. (Female, 18–21 years)

Other young people moved from option to option until they found a pathway that they were interested in pursuing:

I didn't get the [Year 12 result] I wanted but I applied for uni anyway and got knocked back. I did 2 weeks of a cabinet maker apprenticeship but I got bored and quit. Then I got into sport at TAFE and now I'm back at TAFE doing personal training with my sights on getting into Physio. I'm trying to get in through the back door. (Male, 18–21 years)

This quote demonstrates that young people's pathways to their career may differ substantially.

Young people may also experience challenges in adapting to the workforce. A study which interviewed 11 young people four times in their first year of full-time work found that they faced a number of new challenges for which school had not prepared them, including: getting to work on time; coping with long working days; becoming familiar with the organisational culture; managing difficult, complex or unfamiliar tasks; and dealing with unpleasant or ineffectual bosses (Smith, 2003). The study also found a number of factors which helped the young people settle in, including: an adult mentor; having a family member to talk to; their workplace's familiarity with employing school leavers; and the young person's own self-efficacy (Smith, 2003).

The Employing Young Workers project by the Brotherhood of St Laurence set out to explore possible workplace practices that could contribute to the effectiveness of inducting, managing and retaining young workers (Tresize-Brown, 2004). There is a general recognition that young people are crucial to the future of business and the economy, but there are problems in attracting young people into certain jobs, and/or keeping young people as employees. Through interviews and surveys with both employers and young employees, this research was intended to assist employers to consider what they are doing to attract, recruit and manage young workers. The research uncovered:

- the importance of formal induction – for training, orientation, information about responsibilities and entitlements and occupational health and safety; and
- the need for management skills to ensure good communication, rapport development rapport between supervisors and young people, and on the job training.

The authors concluded that employers had a responsibility to provide adequate management skills and workplace practices for young people, somewhat akin to the responsibilities schools and parents had to young people in other areas (Tresize-Brown, 2004).

6.4 Income

The decisions that young people make relating to employment or study have definite implications for their personal income. As young people are often still dependent, or partly dependent, on their parents for their economic welfare, it is important to look both at personal income and at household income to understand financial security.

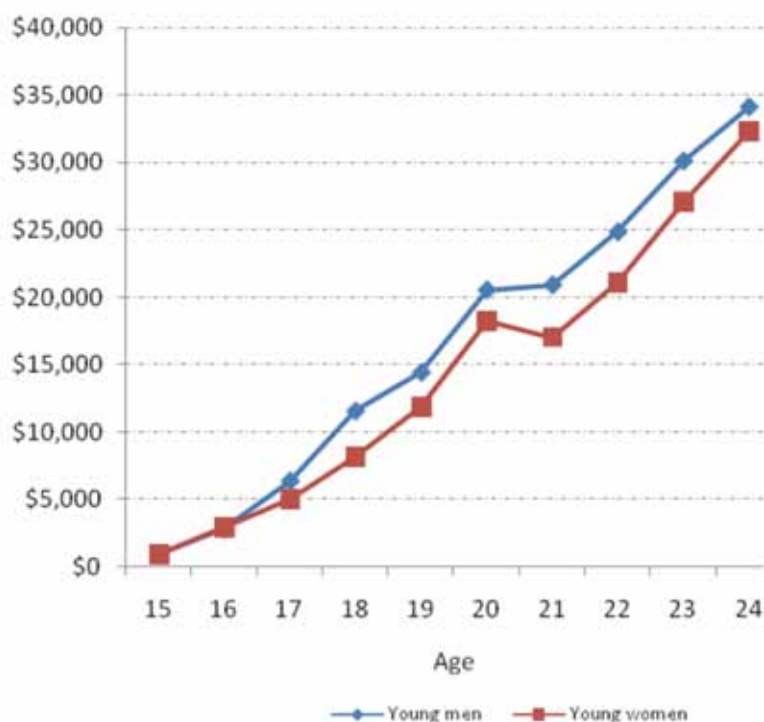
Many of the young people in the focus groups recognised that they needed a certain level of education to attain their ideal income. Most also stated that they remained at home to 'save money' and/or increase their disposable income.

Personal income

One advantage of getting older, at least for young people, is that personal disposable income increases. Figure 6.3 shows how levels of average annual personal disposable income steadily increase between the ages of 15 and 24 years. The positive relationship between age and increases in income over this period in life is almost linear, with the exception of a 'kink' between ages 20 and 21 years. This may reflect a transition from a period of education to a period of full-time employment, and the fact that many of these

young people are still living at home. Young women's income is significantly less than young men's. This is likely to be the result of women working fewer hours, but may also be compounded by working in lower paid positions.

Figure 6.3: Average annual personal disposable income for working young people 15–24 years in Australia



Source: HILDA 2007

Note: Population weights applied

Young people's income is most directly affected by their choices in relation to paid work and study. Table 6.2 reports the average annual income for young people 15–24 years by main activity status (the average adult income for those of working-age – 15–64 years – is provided for comparison). As expected, young people who are in paid work have the highest average income. Those combining studying and working earn approximately half that of their counterparts in full-time work.

Table 6.2: Average annual personal disposable income for young people 15–24 years by main activity status over one year and average annual personal disposable income for working age adult

	Personal disposable income		
	Men 15–24 years	Women 15–24 years	Total 15–24 years
Paid work	\$28,531	\$26,320	\$27,499
Study	\$1,713	\$1,633	\$1,673
Paid work and study	\$14,503	\$12,565	\$13,528
Not in paid work or study	\$5,588	\$11,881	\$8,707
Working age adult (25–64 years)	\$47,889	\$31,187	\$39,518

Source: HILDA 2007

Note: Population weights applied

On average young men earn only 60 per cent of the average adult male income; whereas young women are already earning 84 per cent of the average adult female wage. This is likely to be related to the fact that women work part-time because of care responsibilities. But whatever the reason, it means that young women aged 15–24 years are very close to the level of income they can expect to earn over the course of their working lives. In other words, at 24 years of age women have almost peaked in their earning capacity. Men on the other hand increase their earnings considerably as they get older.

The gender gap in terms of income therefore increases substantially after the age of 24. Female 15–24-year-olds in paid work earn \$2,211 less than their male counterparts, and this amounts to around 92 per cent of the average income of men of the same age. For female adults of working-age (25–64 years), personal income is 65 per cent of adult male personal income. This largely related to the fewer paid working hours undertaken by mothers. In the case of the incomes of young people not in paid work or education, the gender difference is reversed. The average personal income of young women in this category is twice as large as that of the young men. This is most likely due to child-related benefits paid to mothers.

Young people who are studying and not working have very low levels of personal income (an average of \$1,633 per year). However, these young people are the ones most likely to be living with two parents, and consequently they are least likely to be financially disadvantaged. Mission Australia's survey found that parents were the main source of income for 72 per cent of their young respondents. The survey also found, unsurprisingly, that respondents became less financially dependent on their parents as they got older, although not always because they had found employment. Sometimes financial independence from family was made possible by becoming eligible for a government allowance (Mission Australia, 2008: 8).

There are a number of income supports available to Australian young people who are not in paid employment, including Youth Allowance,²⁰ Austudy²¹ and ABSTUDY.²² The Family Tax Benefit may be available to help families with the cost of raising a young person who is not receiving Youth Allowance or a similar payment.²³ In 2006–07, 335,081 young Australians received Youth Allowance, including 266,383 full-time students. A further 29,016 and 54,278 received Austudy and ABSTUDY respectively. In total, over the 2006-07 financial year, these payments accounted for \$2,446,868 in expenditure (ABS, 2008b).

Income satisfaction

According to findings from the Australian Temperament Project most 19–20-year-olds are satisfied with their personal incomes, although one-fifth (21%) indicated they were only just managing to get by, and 6 per cent said they were finding it difficult or very difficult.²⁴ The most likely explanation for the low rate of financial strain reported by this group of young people is the fact that many were still living with their parents. Those earning less than \$300 a week were significantly less likely to report financial strain if they were living at home than if they were living away from home. Among those receiving more than \$300, financial strain was not related to their living circumstances (Smart and Sanson, 2005).

20 Youth Allowance supports young people aged 16–20 years actively seeking employment and full-time students aged 16–24 years. The rate of payment depends on age and circumstances and is subject to income and assets tests. If the young person is not living independently, tests of parental income, family assets, and family actual means also apply.

21 Austudy payment is paid to students 25 years and over who would not be able to study full-time without financial help. An individual income and assets test applies.

22 ABSTUDY payment is paid to students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who are studying an approved course at an approved educational institution and who are not receiving other government assistance for study.

23 The FTB may be payable for a young person up to 21 years of age, or aged between 21 and 24 years who is studying full-time.

24 In this study just over two-thirds of young people were earning \$300 a week or less. The most common weekly income range was \$150 to \$300 (two-fifths of respondents), with almost one-third receiving more than this, and around one-quarter receiving less. Two per cent did not have any income.

Contribution to the economy

As young people earn money in paid work, they contribute to the national wealth. One measure of this wealth is gross national income.²⁵ The total gross personal income of young people 15–24 years was approximately \$50 billion in 2007. This represents about 5 per cent of gross disposable income (June 2007). Not surprisingly, the vast majority of this is contributed by young people 20–24 years (4% of national income). When only wages and salaries are counted, young people 15–24 years contribute 10 per cent (8% by young people 20–24 years) to the gross national income.

Household income

Household income is a more reliable indicator than personal income for determining people's financial security. Household structure, for example, is one of the strongest determinants of youth poverty (Aasve, Lacovou and Mencarini, 2006).

Household income by living arrangements

The households with the highest annual disposable income are young people living with two parents, and young people living with partners and without children (Table 6.3; HILDA 2007). Those living with partners and children fare better than young people living with lone parents or as single parents themselves. Young people living alone have the lowest average income.

Table 6.3 shows that young people in one-parent households and young people who live alone are disproportionately poor. About one-fifth of young people live with lone parents, yet they comprise one-third of all young people living below the 50 per cent poverty line.²⁶ Similarly, young people living alone comprise about 6 per cent of the population of young people 12–24 years overall, but they make up about one-fifth of those who are poor.

In contrast, young people living with two parents account for only one-third of the poor, although they make up almost two-thirds of the population of young people 12–24 years. Therefore young people without family support are at some risk, particularly because of the low level of the Youth Allowance, which is over \$100 per week lower than the single age pension (Kamp et al., 2008: 8).

The poverty rate is highest for young people who are single parents. This is a small proportion of the population of young people, but obviously these are a vulnerable group (Table 6.3; HILDA 2007).

²⁵ Gross National Income is the aggregate value of gross primary incomes for all institutional sectors, including net primary income receivable from non-residents. GNI was formerly called gross national product (GNP).

²⁶ Poverty is measured in terms of income thresholds at a given proportion of median household disposable income, usually 50 or 60 per cent. This provides a measure of relative income poverty. Income is typically equivalised to take into consideration variations in household sizes and the associated economies of scale (Marks, 2007).

Table 6.3: Equivalised household median disposable income and selected poverty statistics for young people 12–24 years in Australia by living arrangement

Living with/in	Equivalised household median annual disposable income	Population Share	Population share of poor		Poverty rate	
			50 % Poverty line	60 % Poverty line	50 % poverty line	60 % poverty line
Two parents	\$40,451	0.60	0.32	0.36	0.06	0.10
Lone parent	\$29,799	0.19	0.35	0.33	0.21	0.30
Alone	\$23,055	0.06	0.19	0.15	0.36	0.45
Group household*	\$34,513	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.14	0.23
Partner no child	\$40,306	0.07	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.08
Partner with child	\$33,698	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.08	0.17
Single with child	\$22,500	0.01	0.04	0.03	0.40	0.55
Other	\$37,818	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.21	0.29
Total	\$36,778	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.11	0.17

Source: Authors' calculations, HILDA 2007

*Under-represented in HILDA 2007 compared with Census 2006

Notes: Modified OECD equivalence scale used; Population weights applied

General poverty rates for young people

Overall poverty rates for young people aged 12–24 years are similar to the population as a whole. About one in ten young people fall below the poverty line of 50 per cent of median equivalised income, and just under one in five fall below the 60 per cent line. These rates are slightly lower than poverty rates reported for the population overall. Headey (2006) reports poverty rates of 13 and 20 per cent for the 50 and 60 per cent poverty line respectively.

Poverty rates naturally increase as the poverty line is shifted from 50 to 60 per cent of median equivalised income, but the increase is more dramatic for certain categories of young people. For example, the increase is particularly marked for young people living in lone-parent households and for those living alone. The percentage of young people in poverty who live with partners and children also increases disproportionately when the 60 per cent line is used. This reflects a precarious position, especially given the recent financial downturn, because these are the households that are very vulnerable to poverty. However, it is young lone parents who have the highest poverty rate. More than half of them have an equivalised income below the 60 per cent poverty line.

Poverty rates by activity and cultural background

Young people's main activity status (whether they are in work, in education, in both or in neither) and their cultural background, also impact on the likelihood of living in a poor household.

Young people's income from paid work contributes to household income and helps some families remain above the poverty line. When a young person is in paid employment (full or part-time) households are much less likely to fall below the poverty line. As a consequence, a much higher proportion of young people who are only in education live in households below the poverty line. This is especially the case if the young people are neither in education nor paid work (Table 6.4).

Finally, young people born in Australia and those born overseas who speak English at home are very similar in terms of poverty and close to the poverty results for all households with young people 12–24 years. Those young people born overseas who do not speak English at home are, however, more likely to live in households that fall below the poverty line. For example, about 16 per cent of young people not born in Australia and who do not speak English at home live in households below the 50 per cent poverty line, compared with 10 per cent of young people born in Australia. These differences are not as large as observed when examining main activity status or living arrangement, but it is nonetheless important to be aware of these differences (Table 6.4).

Table 6.4: Equivalised household median disposable income and selected poverty statistics for young people 12–24 years in Australia by main activity (over one year) and cultural background

	Equivalised household median disposable income	Population share	Population share of poor		Poverty rate	
			50 % poverty line	60 % poverty line	50 % poverty line	60 % Poverty line
Main activity status						
Paid work	\$41,072	0.22	0.14	0.14	0.07	0.11
Study	\$32,404	0.40	0.50	0.49	0.14	0.21
Paid work study	\$39,709	0.34	0.25	0.27	0.08	0.14
None	\$24,394	0.04	0.12	0.10	0.37	0.47
Cultural background						
Born in Australia	\$37,325	0.74	0.68	0.72	0.10	0.17
Born overseas: English spoken at home	\$38,156	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.11	0.15
Born overseas: English not spoken at home	\$33,517	0.16	0.23	0.20	0.16	0.21
Total	\$36,778	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.11	0.17

Source: Authors' calculations, HILDA 2007

Notes: Modified OECD equivalence scale used; Population weights applied

Youth debt/access to credit

A further aspect related to income, and particularly topical in recent times, is the access young people have to consumer credit. A notable feature of the economic boom in Australia has been a widening of access to consumer credit, and many young Australians have been directly affected by this.

The legal age for access to credit is 18 years, and so population data is confined to young people 18–24 years. According to the General Social Survey (2006), just over half of all 18–24-year-olds have some consumer debt, mostly car loans or other personal loans (73%), and about half of those have credit cards (i.e. about one quarter of 18–24-year-olds). About half of those with credit cards pay the balance in full every month or almost every month, but about one-fifth hardly ever or never pay the full balance every month.

Young people who were over 18 discussed the ease with which they could access bank loans and credit cards in the focus groups:

The banks give loans way too easily these days, credit cards way too easily, it's just so easy to get money and quick. (Female, 18–21 years, Sydney)

Although 18 is the legal age for access to credit, younger people do borrow money. A survey of 616 young people aged 12 to 17 years in 2007 found that more than a quarter of them owed money at the time they were surveyed (26%), and an additional 36 per cent had been in debt at an earlier stage. Almost all the young people in debt owed money informally to their parents, family members or friends. Only 3 per cent of young people were in formal debt owing money to a company, such as a mobile phone carrier or a bank. The average amount of the debt was \$296 (Vittles et al., 2008).

6.5 Conclusion

Almost half of teenagers 15–19 years and two in three young adults are employed. Employment for young people is often in a part-time or casual capacity because of the combination of paid work and study. This can help young people further transition into full-time work, and it also helps young people avoid living in a household in poverty.

Indigenous young people are less likely to be employed than their non-Indigenous counterparts and far more likely to be unemployed. Young people from low SES backgrounds and those who have not completed Year 12 are also less likely to be employed. As the unemployment rates for all young people have grown as a result of the global financial crisis, policies need to work towards ensuring that the gap between young people who are most likely to obtain employment and those least likely to be employed does not increase.

Young people's income is closely tied to their participation in employment and education. While young people who do not work have very low incomes, most are in education and living with their parents. Those at particular risk of poverty are young people living alone and those who do not have family support and young people born overseas who do not speak English at home. In general, however, young people experience a sharp increase in income as they get older and most move into employment.

Key points: employment and income

Employment

- Almost half of all 15–19-year-olds (44%) and over two-thirds of all 20–24-year-olds (69%) were employed, with men and women having similar participation rates (ABS Census, 2006).
- The majority of teenagers were employed in a part-time capacity. Young adults were more likely to be employed full-time than teenagers, but levels of part-time employment were high largely because of combining work and education. Young men were more likely than young women to be employed full-time, and young women to be employed part-time (ABS Time Use Survey, 2006).
- Young people are highly likely to be employed in casual positions, and women far more likely than men (HILDA, 2007).
- For employed young men 15–24 years the main occupations were technicians and trade workers (28%), labourers (22%) and sales workers (16%), and for young women, the main occupations were sales workers (32%), community and personal services workers (19%), clerical and administrative workers (19%), and professionals (11%) (ABS Census, 2006).
- Once again, Indigenous young people were disadvantaged in comparison with non-Indigenous young people:
 - fewer than one-third of Indigenous teenagers were employed (31%), compared to nearly 44 per cent of non-Indigenous 15–19-year-olds;
 - just under half (49%) the Indigenous young adults 20–24 years were employed, in comparison with 69 per cent of non-Indigenous young adults;
 - Indigenous young people who are employed are more likely than their counterparts in the wider Australian population to be in part-time, low-paid, insecure jobs (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009).
- CDEP has provided employment for Indigenous young people in places where there would not otherwise be any employment opportunities, and without CDEP, unemployment among Indigenous people would have been higher (Long and North, 2009; Hunter, 2001).
- Low SES can disadvantage young people's post-school employment outcomes (Boese and Scutella, 2006).
- Young people who complete school were more likely than early school leavers to get full-time work (ABS Census 2006).
- Most research suggests that VET participation can lead to full-time work, particularly for those who take up apprenticeships and traineeships (Curtis, 2008; NCVER, 2007). But research results are sometimes mixed.
- Part-time employment or some combination of employment and education can assist in later transitioning into full-time work (Kamp et al., 2008).

Unemployment

- Initial experiences of unemployment reduce the chances of subsequent full-time work (Marks, 2005).
- 6.6 per cent of 15–19-year-olds and 5.8 per cent of 20–24-year-olds were unemployed at the time of the 2006 Census.
- Unemployment has increased considerably for young people as a result of the recent global economic crisis: 12.3 per cent of 15–24-year-olds were unemployed in June 2009 (seasonally adjusted and includes young people in education looking for work, ABS, 2009a).
- Both employed and unemployed young people are concerned about their future employment prospects.

- 26 per cent of Indigenous 15–19-year-olds and 19 per cent of 20–24-year-olds were unemployed in 2006 (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2009). It is important that the current economic climate does not undermine previously declining unemployment rates of Indigenous young Australians.
- More Indigenous young people (24%) highly valued getting a job, compared to non-Indigenous young people (16%) (Mission Australia, 2008).

Personal income

- Levels of personal income steadily increase between 15 and 24 years of age.
- Young women's income was significantly less than young men's.
- Young people's income is most directly affected by whether they engage in paid work and/or study, with those studying and working earning about half of what their counterparts earn in full-time work.
- At 24-years-old, women have almost peaked in their earning capacity, while men's earnings increase considerably as they get older.
- Those who are only studying have very low levels of personal income, but they are most likely to be living with their parents.

Household income

- Household income is a more reliable indicator than personal income for determining people's financial security.
- Households which include young people that have the highest annual disposable income are those where the young people live with their parents, and those where they live with partners and without children.
- Those living with partners and children fare better than young people living with lone parents or as lone parents themselves.
- Young people living alone and without family support have the lowest income and are most at risk.
- When young people are in paid employment (full or part-time), their households are much less likely to fall below the poverty line.
- Young people born overseas who do not speak English at home are more likely to live in households that fall below the poverty line.

Credit and debt

- Just over half 18–24-year-olds have some consumer debt, mostly car loans or other personal loans, and about half of those have a credit card.
- About one-fifth of young people with credit cards hardly ever or never pay the full balance every month.
- More than a quarter of 12–17-year-olds surveyed in 2007 owed money, and 36 per cent had been in debt (mostly to parents, family members or friends).

7 Domestic work and care

Most young people in Australia spend substantial proportions of their time engaged in paid work and education, but they are also productively contributing through unpaid domestic work and care within the household. This work consists of a variety of tasks like washing dishes, vacuuming, doing laundry and caring for children or other family members. These tasks are often menial, not always enjoyable, but vital for the successful functioning of the household. As with adults, research shows that young women spend more time performing this work than young men (Maudlin and Meeks 1990; Bianchi & Robinson 1997; Hofferth & Sandberg 2001). Australia is noted for a very traditional gender division of paid and unpaid work between men and women, especially among parents with young children (Craig, 2007). It is expected, therefore, that young women would spend more time in unpaid domestic work and care than young men and for this to be particularly acute in young families. This section examines the time young people spend on domestic work and care and the difference between the genders.

How much time do young people spend on domestic and care activities?

Table 7.1 reports the average hours per week in domestic work²⁷ and care for young men and women 15–19 years and 20–24 years in Australia. As expected, young women across both age groups spend more time in domestic work and care than young men (6.5 hours compared to 4.2 for men in the 15–19-year group and 13.3 hours compared to 4.9 for men in the 20–24 years group). The gender difference is particularly pronounced for young people 20–24 years, with females spending over 8 hours per week more than males on domestic activities. The substantial rise in domestic activity for young adult females is likely to be either related to them becoming parents, or moving out of the parental home.

Table 7.1: Average hours per week in domestic work and care for young men and women 15–19 years and 20–24 years in Australia

Age (years)	Gender	Domestic work and care time (hours per week)
15–19	Male	4.2
	Female	6.5
20–24	Male	4.9
	Female	13.3

Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

Does domestic work change depending on the other activities young people do?

On average, the time young people spend in domestic work and care changes depending on whether they work, study, work and study or neither work nor study. This, however, differs by gender. The gender discrepancies occur across activities and increase between the two age groups.

Table 7.2 shows that on average all young people take part in some domestic work, despite the other activities they are undertaking. Males range from an average of 5 to 21 hours of domestic work per week depending on their other activities and this barely fluctuates as they get older. For example, 15–19-year-old males in paid work do 9 hours of domestic work per week compared to the 7 hours completed by 20–24-year-old males in paid work. Males in both age groups who are in education only do 5 hours per week; and those in both paid work and education do an average of 5 hours per week if they are 15–19 years

²⁷ In other time use studies shopping is included as a domestic activity. It has not been counted here because the majority of young people are living with their parents and shopping is often a leisure activity, as opposed to a necessary domestic role, for young people. Females spend more time shopping across both age groups and overall, 20-24-year-olds spend more time shopping than 15–19-year-olds (1.8 compared to 1.5 hours per week for men respectively, and 4.0 compared to 3.7 hours for females respectively).

or 7 hours if they are 20–24 years. Male 15–19-year-olds who do not work or study spend the most time on domestic activities at 21 hours per week. The greatest decrease occurs for this latter group, with 20–24-year-old males who are out of work and study only contributing an average of 9 hours per week in domestic work.

Table 7.2: Average hours of domestic work and care for young people by gender, age and other activity status

Age (years)	Paid work		Education		Paid work and education		Not in paid work or education	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
15–19	9	12	5	9	5	9	21	22
20–24	7	16	5	17	7	11	9	53

Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

Despite the combination of activity undertaken, the time females spend on domestic activities increases as they get older. Females 15–19 years in education only or in work and education average 9 hours per week on domestic activities, compared to the 17 hours (education only) or 11 hours (work and education) spent by 20–24-year-old females. Female 15–19-year-olds in paid work average 12 hours per week, compared to 16 hours undertaken by their 20–24-year-old counterparts. Finally, females who did neither education nor paid work had the highest levels of domestic activity at 22 hours for 15–19-year-olds and 53 hours for 20–24-year-olds.

In every category, females do more domestic work than their male counterparts. The gender inequities are between 3 and 44 hours (depending on the main activity status) overall, but are much sharper when comparing young adults to teenagers. The 15–19-year-old females do an average of between 1 and 4 hours more domestic work than their male counterparts. Comparatively, young adult females do between 4 and 44 more hours on domestic work than males doing the same other activities.

7.1 Conclusion

On average, all young people contribute some unpaid domestic work and care to the household in which they live. The average time they spend on domestic activities is largely contingent on the other main activities they undertake (i.e. education and/or work). In all possible combinations of activities, females do more domestic work and care than males and the gender differences increase as young people get older. This suggests that the gender discrepancies seen in later life start even before young people reach adulthood.

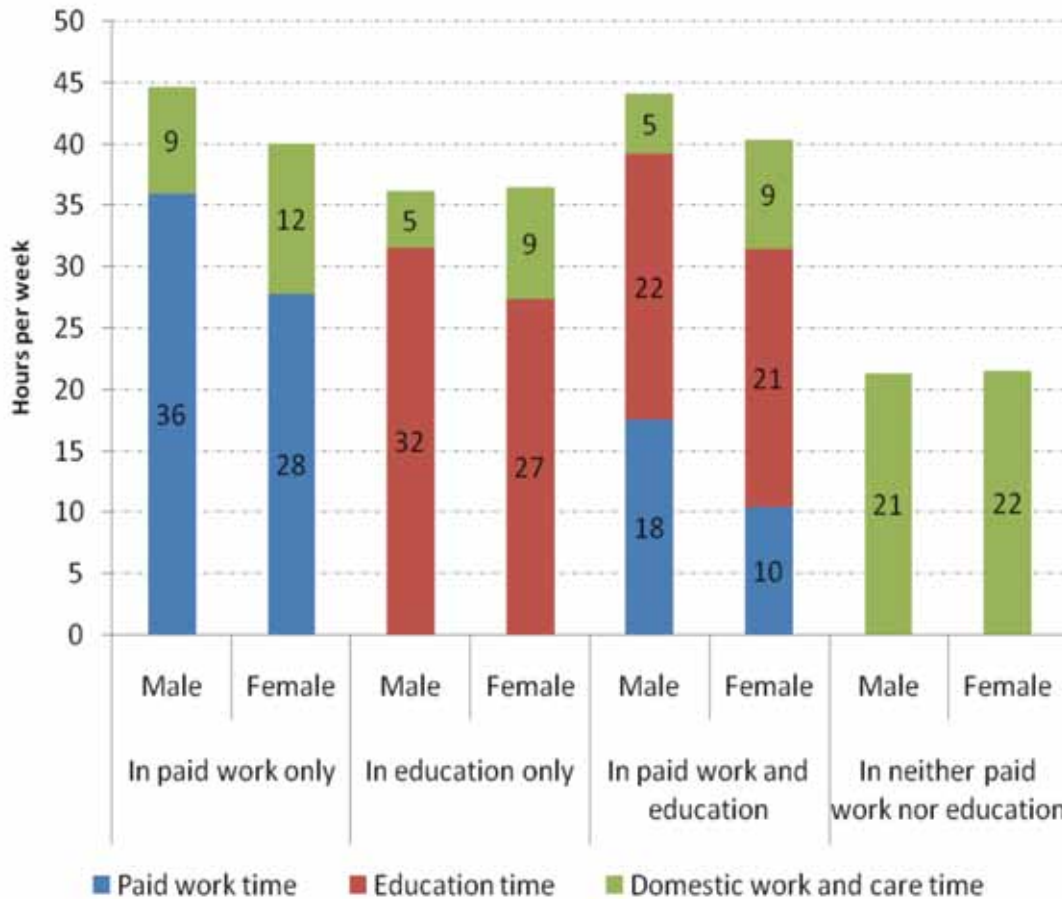
Key points: domestic work and care

- Young people productively contribute through unpaid domestic work and care within the household.
- Young women spend more time in domestic work and care than young men (female 15–19-year-olds spend 6.5 hours, compared to 4.2 for men in the same age group and female 20–24-year-olds spend 13.3 hours compared to 4.9 for men).
- Although the time females spend on domestic activities increases as they get older, it barely fluctuates as men age.
- Male 15–19-year-olds who do not work or study spend the most time on domestic activities at 21 hours per week. However, male 20–24-year-olds out of work and study only contributing an average of 9 hours per week in domestic work.
- Females who did neither education nor paid work had the highest levels of domestic activity at 22 hours for 15–19-year-olds and 53 hours for 20–24-year-olds.
- In every combination of work, study and/or domestic activity, females do more domestic work than their male counterparts.

8 Negotiating education, work and/or domestic activities

Earlier sections have examined education, work and domestic roles. It is useful to bring these productive activities together to build a comprehensive picture of how young people combine these activities on a daily basis. Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2 illustrate that young people spend a large proportion of their week in productive activity: in education, paid work and/or domestic work and care. The time young people spend on productive activities differs by age, gender and on the combinations of activities undertaken.

Figure 8.1: Average hours per week in paid work, education and domestic/care activities of male and female 15–19-year-olds

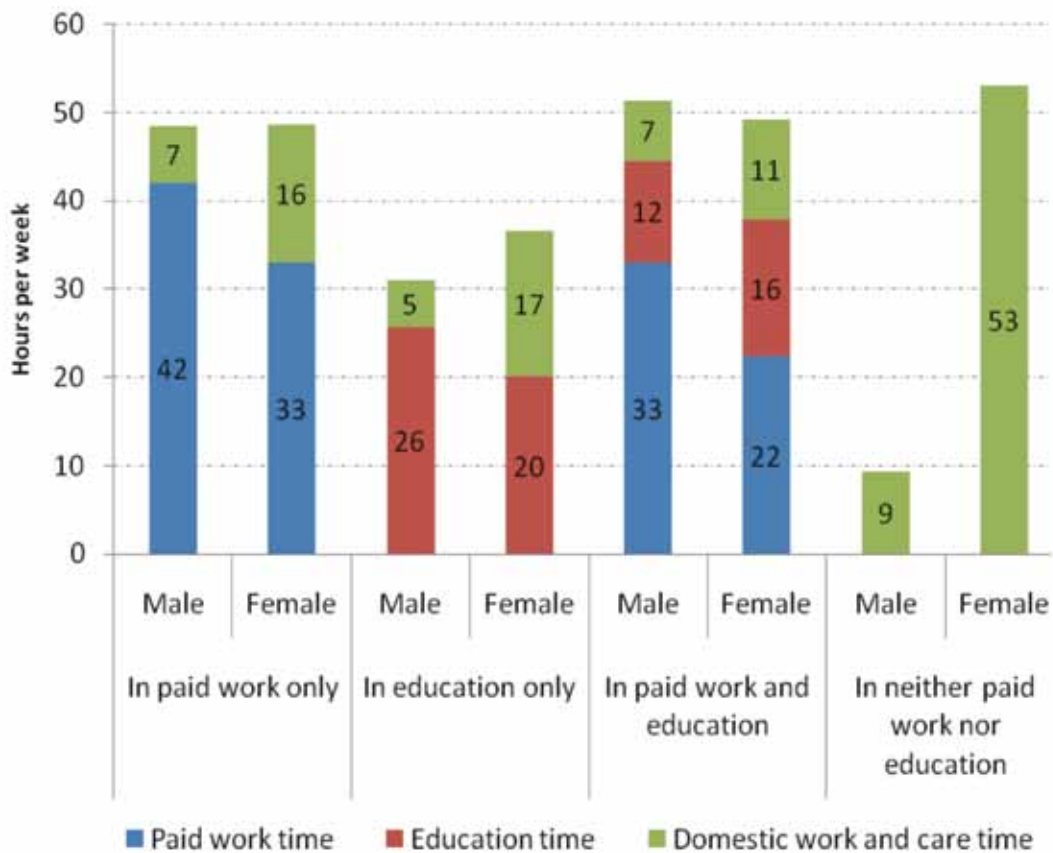


Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

Paid work and domestic activity

15–19-year-old males and females in paid work undertake 45 and 40 hours of productive activity per week respectively when their paid work and domestic activity is combined. Yet, females spend less time working and more time doing domestic activities. Similarly, although males and females 20–24 years both spend 49 hours per week on paid work and domestic activities in total, females are spending 9 fewer hours in paid work and 9 more hours on domestic activity than their male counterparts. This reflects traditional gender roles and the higher levels of full-time employment for young men and the likelihood that young men work longer hours.

Figure 8.2: Hours per week in work, education and domestic/care activities of male and female 20–24-year-olds



Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

Education and domestic activity

Young men and women 15–19 years spend almost equal total amounts of time studying and doing domestic work (37 hours in total compared to 36 hours per week respectively). However, females spend less time studying (27 hours per week) than young men (32 hours per week) and their domestic work is twice as high (6 hours for young women compared with 3 hours for young men).

Young adult males spend less time combining education and domestic work than younger males (an average of 31 hours compared to 37 hours respectively). Females from the two age groups (15–19 and 20–24 years) spend roughly the same amount of total time on education and domestic work each week (an average of 37 hours).

The gender split between time in education and domestic work is exacerbated for the older group, with females spending 6 hours less on education and an additional 12 hours per week on domestic activity. This suggests that young women may possibly be disadvantaged by reduced hours in education and increased hours in unpaid work.²⁸

²⁸ We stress, however, that we cannot link the time in education to performance or ability so these findings should be interpreted with caution in terms of potential outcomes.

Paid work, education and domestic activity

When domestic work and care is added to the time young people are in paid work and education, the total approaches or exceeds 40 hours per week for those aged 15–19 years, and approaches or exceeds 50 hours per week for those aged 20–24 years. These represent serious time commitments to non-leisure activities and place young people on a comparative footing with older working age adults, demonstrating that young people are generally highly productive.

Young females 15–19 years spend 40 hours per week combining paid work, education and domestic activities. They average less time in paid work, similar time in education, and more time in domestic work and care than male 15–19-year-olds. In total, males spend an additional 5 hours combining these three activities, by spending an additional 8 hours in paid work, an additional hour in education and 4 less hours on domestic activities.

Young men and women 20–24 years spend similar total hours per week combining work, education and domestic activities (52 and 49 hours respectively). While the gender differences increase in regard to paid work (with males spending an additional 11 hours), females are spending an additional four hours in education than their male counterparts and the domestic load only differs by 2 hours per week.

Domestic work and care with no study or work

On average male and female 15–19-year-olds who do not work or study spend around 20 hours per week on domestic and care responsibilities. This shows that a number of young people who are disengaged from work and education have caring responsibilities and are playing a productive role in society. Some of these young people are likely to be part of the estimated 119,436 young people aged 15–24 years who identified as carers in the 2006 Census and a further 77,607 ‘potential carers’ – young people lived with a person who had a disability, but did not identify as a young carer in the Census (Hill, 2009; Cass et al., 2009). However, the average of 20 hours indicates that there are also a proportion of 15–19-year-olds who are disengaged and who have substantial amounts of free time.

For 20–24-year-olds not working or studying, the gender division in time spent in domestic and care work increased significantly (Figure 8.2). This was of particular concern among those who were not working or not studying. Females were likely to be productively engaged for long hours in caring roles despite not working or studying, spending an average of 53 hours per week on domestic and care activities. This single group of 20–24-year-olds were spending the largest proportion of time per week in productive activity. In comparison, male 20–24-year-olds out of work and disengaged from education were only spending 9 hours per week on domestic work and care. These young men may be at particular risk of becoming very socially excluded.

8.1 Conclusion

On average, young people lead very productive lives. They spend many hours of their week undertaking productive activities – paid work, education and/or domestic and care activities. While the total time young people spend on productive activities is fairly equal among females and males, males are spending more time working and in education and fewer hours on domestic work and care activities than their female counterparts. As earlier sections have shown, the gender divides are already surfacing among the younger age group and they increase substantially by the time young people are 20–24 years.

Female 20–24-year-olds who are not working or not studying are spending long hours (53 per week) on domestic work and care activities. Contrarily, males out of work and out of education are particularly at risk because they are almost completely disengaged from productive activity.

Key points: negotiating paid work, education and/or domestic activities

- Young people spend a large proportion of their week in productive activity: in education, paid work and/or domestic work and care.
- The time young people spend on productive activities differs by age, gender and on the combinations of activities undertaken.
- Males are spending more time working and in education and fewer hours on domestic work and care activities than their female counterparts.
- 15–19-year-old males and females in paid work undertake 45 and 40 hours of productive activity per week respectively when their paid work and domestic activity is combined. However, females spend less time working and more time doing domestic activities.
- Male and female 20–24-year-olds spend 49 hours per week on paid work and domestic activities in total, but females spend 9 fewer hours in paid work and 9 more hours on domestic activity than their male counterparts.
- Young men and women 15–19 years spend 37 and 36 hours per week respectively studying and doing domestic work, but females do 5 hours less study and 3 hours more domestic work.
- 20–24-year-old males spend 31 hours per week combining education and domestic work, compared to the 37 hours of females 20–24 years. The divide is further exacerbated given females average 6 hours less in education.
- Young people who combine paid work, education and domestic activities spend large proportions of their week on productive activity. 15–19-year-olds in this situation approach or exceed 40 hours per week and 20–24-year-olds approach or exceed 50 hours per week.
- Male and female teenagers who do not work or study spend approximately 20 hours per week on domestic and care responsibilities.
- The gender division is stark for 20–24-year-olds not working or studying, with females spending 53 hours per week on domestic work and care, compared to only 9 hours for their male counterparts.

9 Technology use

Communications and information technology has rapidly changed the way in which most Australians live. Almost all aspects of life in Australia are affected by technology and time spent in work, education and personal spheres is increasingly likely to be technologically mediated. Children and young people are widely acknowledged to be amongst the most competent users of technology and are generally more willing to interact with new technologies and more adept at using them than their older peers.

The pace of technological change has been incredibly rapid. Australians are known as early adopters of technology and Australian children known as the 'digital generation' (Livingstone, 2003). Many of the technologies commonly used by young people – instant messaging, social networking websites, chat rooms, and portable digital music players – barely existed ten years ago. Conversely, many technologies which have been available for far longer – television, radio and video games – remain central to families' media use today (ACMA, 2007: 1).

While the long-term effects of these technologies are unknown, it is clear that technology is already changing the way that many Australians, and young Australians in particular, perform daily tasks and interact with other members of society. This section explores the types of technologies young people use, which young people are missing out and some of the risks and benefits of using technology.

9.1 What technologies do young people use?

Almost all Australian young people have access to a wide variety of information and communication technologies. By 2007 almost all Australian households (90%) had two or more television sets and three or more mobile phones in their household.²⁹ Nearly all 17-year-old Australians (90%) used a mobile telephone, with young women more likely to have a mobile than young men. Nine out of 10 Australian families had an internet connection, compared to just 7 per cent of families in 1995. By 2007, almost three in four families had broadband internet (ACMA, 2007).

Although young men and women are equally likely to use the internet, their online activities differ. Young women were more likely to use the internet for communication, with a preference for email, instant messaging and social networking. Conversely, young men were more likely to play games.³⁰ Young people have become heavily engaged in the interactive web and creating user generated content in the past five years.³¹ Certain aspects of the interactive web, such as social networking sites, appeared to be more popular with young women. In 2007, more than two-thirds of 14–17-year-old Australian females (70%) had their own page on a social networking website, compared to only 50 per cent of males the same age (ACMA, 2007: 9).

Australian guidelines recommend that young people aged 12–18 years spend no more than 2 hours a day engaged in non-educational screen time, such as surfing the internet, watching TV or playing video games (Department of Health and Ageing, 2004). In 2007 young people (aged 8–17 years) were exceeding this recommendation, spending an average of 1¼ hours online each day and watching approximately 2 hours of television (a total of 3¼ hours screen time; ACMA, 2007).

²⁹ Households that have children and young people living in them were also more likely to have subscription television (ACMA, 2007: 4).

³⁰ Game playing is not necessarily a straight-forwardly solitary activity as many young people (and young men in particular) play games with peers who are physically present or against other players via the internet. Even those who chose to play solitary games frequently discuss results and 'tricks' with peers either face-to-face or through online forums.

³¹ The interactive web, sometimes referred to as 'Web 2.0', includes user-generated content websites such as YouTube and Flickr and social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook.

Media consumption was most commonly a solo pursuit and young people were more likely to engage in non-media activities when in the physical company of others (ACMA, 2007). In a number of cases, these activities are being undertaken in private spaces within the home, with around one in five young people having access to a television and/or a computer in their bedroom and one in ten having a game console in their bedroom (ACMA, 2007: 6).

9.2 Which young people are not accessing technology?

While it is clear that Australian young people are overwhelmingly technologically literate and amongst the most prolific users of technology in the world, a small proportion has limited access to information technology for a variety of reasons. Many of the young people who did not access information and communication technologies did so out of choice, but a small but significant number lacked access to these technologies because of reasons including cost, location and physical and intellectual disability.

Young people in rural and remote areas were less likely to have used home computers or the internet than those in cities. Those living in small country towns were worst affected, with people living in rural areas outside of towns only marginally less likely to access to these technologies than the national average (ABS, 2004).³² Teenagers were more likely to use the internet and home computers than were adults. People from Indigenous or non-English speaking backgrounds of all ages, and those not in the labour force were less likely to access these technologies. Older students, male students, students who lived in two-parent families, and those who lived in a house that was owned or being paid-off (rather than being rented) were more likely to use a computer regularly (Vittles, Rintoul, et al., 2008).

Young people from non-English speaking backgrounds and young men were less likely to use mobile phones and more likely to report being reluctant to use a mobile phone. Interestingly, those from relatively poorer areas used their mobile more frequently than those from the relatively wealthier areas³³ (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2007: 2). This could reflect young people in wealthier areas having more access to alternative communication technologies.

Australian schools are increasingly incorporating information technology in teaching and learning³⁴ and schools are an extremely important place for young people from disadvantaged households to access computers and the internet.³⁵ Computer and internet access in other public facilities, such libraries, is also crucial (Notley, 2008) since the most disadvantaged young people are less likely to have home computer or internet access and more likely to be disengaged from education and work (Vittles et al., 2008: 65).

9.3 What are the benefits and risks of technology use?

Access to new communication technologies has created novel ways for young people to access educational and vocational information and to interact socially. New technology has also changed the way that young people arrange their leisure time in that it has allowed them to interact with previously known peers in new ways and also given them the opportunity to access social networks beyond their immediate peer group.

32 In 2004, households in small country towns were significantly less likely to have home computers (32% compared with 42% nationally) or the internet (25% compared with 37% nationally) (ABS, 2004). It is likely that these proportions would have improved over the last five years, however, discrepancies are still likely to exist.

33 Those living in areas with lower socio economic status indexes were 70 per cent more likely to use their mobiles more than 10 times a day than those living in better off areas, while those in the better off areas were 130 per cent more likely not to have used their mobiles at all.

34 In 2008, the Australian Government committed to support the deployment of high speed broadband connections to Australian schools; to provide new information and communication technology equipment for all secondary schools; and to collaborate with others to ensure teachers have access to training in the use of information and communication technology (DEEWR, 2009).

35 While the proportion of Australian households with computer and internet access is high, more disadvantaged households, such households where one or more member was receiving community sector welfare services were significantly less likely to have computer and internet access than other households (Saunders, 2007).

The internet, and user-generated Web 2.0 content in particular, has great potential to bring like-minded people together. This can be particularly beneficial for young people with uncommon interests, those who are discriminated against because of their ethnicity, race, sexuality or disability,³⁶ those who are embarrassed and concerned about seeking help and those who feel isolated or disconnected from their family or communities for other reasons. Equitable access to internet and communications technology also has the potential to reduce some of the disadvantage associated with living in rural and remote locations (Vittles et al., 2008: 65).

On the one hand, young people have access to a far broader range of information and supports than their predecessors and are exposed to a far more varied array of influences than would be available in their immediate environment. Conversely, the increasing variety of choices now available can be overwhelming and present problems in itself. Young people (and indeed adults) may not be able to accurately assess the quality of the information they encounter online and could potentially be exposed to incomplete and inaccurate information and material that is considered inappropriate for their consumption.

Young people are not necessarily passive consumers of media and many have a sophisticated understanding of the media and its effects. For example, two sets of focus groups (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009) highlighted that young people were frequently critical of media portrayals of teenagers and young people. Focus group respondents believed that media portrayals of youth were often inaccurate and sensationalist and tended to focus on negative issues. The comments of a 18–21-year-old female from a rural area were typical:

They just say we [young people] are [all] drug f****d and bad drivers ... Or that we're all sleeping with each other and always drunk. (Female, 18–21 years)

Despite the considerable benefits that internet and peer-to-peer technologies present, there are a number of potential risks associated with increasing use of information technology. As people spend increasingly more time in electronically mediated environments, some commentators are concerned that they risk becoming disengaged from their families and physical communities. Shanahan and Elliott (2009) found that some young focus group respondents were concerned that they were becoming over reliant on technology. An 18–21-year-old female noted:

I think it (technology) runs my life really. I'm on it every day and then even when I get home, because Facebook's not on at work, I'll check that, I check it on my phone... I feel naked without it. I feel lost, I have to go home and get it. (Female, 18–21 years)

Other focus group respondents believed that frequent use of technology was decreasing their social interaction with other peers:

It does seem to diminish the amount of social interaction, instead of saying something to someone's face, you'll just Facebook them. (Female, 18–21 years)

Speaking to people face to face, people aren't confident in that anymore, because it's always in text messaging or from behind a computer (Female, 18–21 years).

The amount of time young people spend on passive technologies may also present risks. Research on media and children and young people's health shows a correlation between high levels of media consumption and poor health outcomes such as overweight and obesity, tobacco and alcohol consumption, mental health concerns and sleeping difficulties (ACMA, 2007).

³⁶ The internet can be particularly useful for people with disability as it can facilitate access to things which may usually be inaccessible to them.

The content young people access on the internet may also be problematic. Although almost all parents saw the internet as beneficial to their child, many chose to monitor what their children were viewing. Three-quarters of internet-connected home computers were in public areas of the home (ACMA, 2007; Generation Next, 2009). An Edith Cowan University report commissioned by the Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy reported that filter use in Australia was relatively uncommon, with only around 20 per cent to 35 per cent of parents using software filters (Dooley, Cross, et al., 2009). Three-quarters of surveyed Australian parents reported having rules about their child's use of not only the internet, but also the television, mobile phones and video/computer games.

Young people living away from their parents had more autonomy over their media consumption. However, Shanahan and Elliott (2009) found that young focus groups participants also had some concerns about technology use. They were particularly concerned about their privacy as their lives became increasingly mediated by technology. As discussed, the small number of young people who do not use information technologies – through choice or lack of access – may become increasingly isolated as the importance of these technologies continues to grow.

There is also increasing evidence that communications technologies, including email, mobile phones, chat rooms and web sites, are being used to bully. This is particularly widespread amongst teenagers and young people (Campbell, 2005). Reported incidents of 'cyber bullying' are increasing in Australia and overseas (Campbell, 2005; Li, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2008). More than a quarter of Year 8 Australian students surveyed in 2004 knew someone who had been bullied using technology and a quarter of those surveyed in the UK National Children's Home study (2002) reported being bullied by mobile phone or on the Internet (Campbell and Gardner, 2005, cited in Campbell, 2005).

Dehue, Bolman, et al., (2008) characterise cyber bullying as being generally anonymous and individualistic in nature. Their analysis of surveys of young people and parents found that cyber bullying is primarily conducted from offenders' homes and most frequently involved name-calling and gossiping. These researchers found that parents generally underestimated their own children's bullying behavior and also the level of victimisation involved in cyber bullying.

Hinduja & Patchin's (2008) analysis of on-line survey data from adolescent Internet users noted that cyber bullying can have significant ramifications on victim's physical and emotional well being. It can also limit some youth people's freedom to use and explore valuable on-line resources. The researchers found that young people were equally likely to be involved in cyber bullying – both as victims and offenders – regardless of race and gender. However, they found that respondents who reported school problems (including traditional bullying), assaultive behavior, and substance use were more likely to be victims and offenders of cyber bullying than other young people. Computer proficiency and time spent on-line were also positively associated to both cyber bullying victimisation and offending.

9.4 Conclusion

While there are certainly costs associated with excessive consumption of media, proficiency and confidence with new technology has great social, economic and personal benefits for young people. Young people are, in general, far more adept at using new technologies than their older peers and may perhaps be more adept at negotiating the challenges and potential pit-falls that an increasingly technological world presents. While technology will inarguably continue to present challenges, it also presents a unique avenue to communicate with young people and has enormous potential to reengage the most marginalised members of society if access is distributed equitably.

Key points: technology use

Television

- Young people (aged 8–17 years) watched approximately 2 hours of television each day

Computers and internet

- In 2007, nine out of 10 Australian families had an internet connection and three-quarters had broadband internet.
- Young people (8–17 years) spent an average of 1¼ hours online each day.
- Young women were more likely to use the internet for communication; young men were more likely to play games.
- Young people from Indigenous or non-English speaking backgrounds, those not in the labour force and those living in small country towns were less likely to access computers or the internet.
- Computer and internet access in schools and other public facilities is extremely important for young people from disadvantaged households.

Mobile Phones

- Nine out of ten 17-year-old Australians used a mobile telephone, with young women more likely to have a mobile than young men.
- Young people from non-English speaking backgrounds and young men were less likely to use mobile phones and more likely to report being reluctant to use a mobile phone.
- Young people from relatively poorer areas used their mobile *more* frequently than those from the relatively wealthier areas

Risks and benefits of technology use

- Parents commonly monitored and controlled their children's access to media. Three-quarters of internet-connected home computers were in public areas of the home, but only a third of Australian households had internet filtering.
- The internet has great potential to bring like-minded people together and can be particularly beneficial for young people who have uncommon interests or are isolated or disconnected from their family or communities.
- The small number of young people who do not use information technologies – through choice or lack of access – may become increasingly isolated as the importance of these technologies continues to grow.
- There is increasing evidence that communications technology is being used to isolate young people, with increased in reported 'cyber bullying'.

10 Social participation: family, friends, leisure and community

Young people's social participation plays a key part of their lives. Their interactions with family and friends impact on their social and emotional well-being. And young people spend considerable time socialising with friends and undertaking leisure activities like sport. They also spend their free time taking part in community activities, including volunteering. The extent to which young people become civically engaged varies, as does their commitment to certain causes, including religion. This section discusses this array of social and community areas of young people's lives.

10.1 Family

The family environment young people grow up in can impact on their social and emotional well-being (AIHW, 2007). Smart and Vassallo (2008) for example, identify a strong association between parent-adolescent relationship quality and the well-being of young people, their family relationships and effective parenting practices. Hemphill et al., (2004) also indicate that family management policies and family conflict can impact on young people's views about school and home. This is also supported by key stakeholders who indicate that young people who are faring well usually have good family support systems, strong connections with community and friends, space where they can spend time with their friends and opportunities for future development. Smart and Vassallo (2008), for example, found that, where parent-child relationship quality was high (as reported by both parents and adolescents) teenagers were progressing well in school, were more adaptable, socially adept and displayed fewer problems such as antisocial behaviour or depression than young people with poor quality parental relationships.

How much time do young people spend with their family?

Results from the ABS Time Use Survey (2006) show that young people aged 15–24 years spend an average of about 40 hours per week with their families (while awake, Table 10.1). A number of characteristics influence the amount of time young people spend with their families. These include, age, gender, living arrangements, geographic location, main activity (study, work, both or none) and birthplace.

Age and gender

Teenagers spend more time with their families than young adults (49 and 40 hours respectively). On average, females also spend more time with their families. The ABS Time Use Survey (2006) shows that young women spend an average of 48 hours per week with family, compared to 40 hours for males (Table 10.1). Similarly, Vassallo (2008) found that young men were less likely than young women to communicate often with parents.

Comments from the focus groups (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009) suggest that time spent and the relationships with family changes as young people get older. Many of the young people reflected on this:

I fight a lot less (with parents) than I did 5 or 6 years ago and that's mainly because I have matured and I understand where they're coming from better but also they trust me in the way that if I can't make up my mind on something that is conforming to their views, they know that at the end of the day I'll still come home and ask them for their advice (Male, 22–24 years).

Living arrangements and geographic location

As expected, young people who live with their parents spend more time with their families. These are more likely to be young people 15–19 years, and so there is some overlap with the differences by age (ABS Time Use Survey, 2006; Table 10.1).

The geographic area in which young people live can also impact on the time they spend with family. Young people who do not live in a major city spend slightly more time with their families than their counterparts living in major cities (46 compared to 43 hours respectively) (Table 10.1; ABS Time Use Survey, 2006).

Table 10.1: Average hours per week young people 15–24 years spend with their families, their friends and time alone by select characteristics

	Time with family	Time with friends	Time alone
Male	39.8	24.4	13.0
Female	47.9	25.0	10.7
15–19 years	48.6	29.3	9.0
20–24 years	38.7	19.9	14.9
Paid work	38.3	18.1	13.8
Study	52.2	30.6	8.9
Paid work and study	38.0	26.4	13.3
No paid work or study	67.8	18.4	7.6
Disability	43.6	25.3	11.6
No disability	44.9	20.7	14.2
Does not live with parents	38.0	19.9	14.5
Lives with parents	51.2	31.0	8.5
Australian born	44.1	24.6	11.9
Born overseas: English at home	44.7	22.9	12.6
Born overseas: no English at home	38.0	28.4	10.7
Lives in major city	42.8	26.1	12.1
Does not live in major city	45.9	21.4	11.4

Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

Main activity

Young people who engage in paid work spend more time alone and less time with their families. Those who are in neither paid work nor study spend the most time with family (an average of 68 hours per week), followed by young people in education (an average of 52 hours per week) (Table 10.1; ABS Time Use Survey, 2006).

Indigenous status

ARACY (2008b) found limited differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people's relationships with family. Just over half of all Australian students 15 years (51%) and Indigenous Australian students 15 years (52%) reported that parents spent time 'just talking' to them more than once a week (data taken from 2000 PISA survey).

Cultural Diversity

Young people born overseas who do not speak English at home spend slightly less time with family than young people born in Australia or those born overseas who speak English at home (Table 10.1; ABS Time Use Survey, 2006). This is likely to be related to refugee and migrant young people who have experienced significant family disruption and loss or isolation from family members (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007).

Many cultures have strong obligations to family. Therefore young people born overseas may be expected to take on more responsibility than is usual in Australia, such as caring for younger children or financially contributing to the household. Differences in gender roles between cultures are also a common issue, particularly in relation to the status and expectations of young women (Francis and Cornfoot, 2007).

Quality of family relationships

Research from the Australian Temperament Project (Smart and Sanson, 2005) showed that among 19–20-year-olds, 82 per cent of young people described their relationship with their parent/s or step-parent/s as warm and close. There was also little reported conflict, with 85 per cent saying that conflict with their parents occurred infrequently or not at all. Only 10 per cent of the 19–20-year-olds surveyed experienced conflict with their parents on a weekly basis and 4 per cent more often. When conflict occurred, it was most commonly about helping around the house (49%), money (39%), work (24%) and staying out late (20%). Similarly, Shanahan and Elliott's (2009) focus groups showed that young people often have a strong bond with their parents, despite ups and downs in their relationships. They found that 15–17-year-olds were most likely to experience difficult relationships with their parents, with conflict particularly occurring over school work and socialising:

I think we're looking for more freedom but they [parents] don't think we should have it.
(Male, 15–17 years)

I find it really stupid though how parents hold their children back, that will just make them rebel. If you let them go out and do what they want to do, they won't be as bad. (Female, 15–17 years).

Those young people aged 18 years and over perceived their relationships with their parents to be getting stronger and becoming less adversarial, while those in their mid-twenties saw relationships with their parents as more equal, with parents perceived as friends and a source of advice, rather than authority:

I find your relationship with them [parents] improves when you move out for a while and then if you come back to them you appreciate it a lot more, you get along with them better.
(Female, 22–24 years)

Young adults also reflected on the important role their parent(s) played in their teenage years:

Some things, I remember my old man saying to me, "I'm that disappointed with you". When he said that, I'd think, "f**k, that is so stupid, why did I do that?" Pointless things that you did that caused other people dramas. As soon as you hear your old man say he's disappointed, it's no good. I don't know what age you are when you stop and think, "Why?" Sometimes it just hits you.
(Male, 22–24 years)

This shows that not only did relationships improve over time, but young people became increasingly aware of their social and emotional development.

10.2 Friendships

The vast majority of young people interact with friends. Almost all young people (94%) report having friends they can confide in (ABS Time Use Survey, 2006). Smart and Sanson (2005) found that half of 19–20-year-olds surveyed had 3–5 close friends, while over 40 per cent had 15 or more friends with whom they were less close.

Key stakeholders suggest that social networks are central to young people's engagement and growth and they are valued by young people. Mission Australia (2008) found that friendships are highly valued by young people, with some differences between age groups. For example, 63 per cent of 11–19-year-olds highly valued friendships, compared with 45 per cent of 20–24-year-olds. Smart and Sanson (2005) also found that young people aged 19–20 years viewed friendships positively, with 86 per cent describing their relationship with their best friend/s as warm and close.

The young people who participated in the focus groups also discussed the importance of friendships, particularly as a source of support:

Your friends are really important, they get you through a lot, for guidance, for having a good time, having a laugh; they're a big part of your life. (Female, 22–24 years old, Melbourne)

You tend to talk to friends first, if you are having problems with something (Female, 15–17 years).

For young people who were born overseas and came to Australia without their family, friendships were enormously important.

How much time do young people spend with friends?

Young people 15–24 years spend an average of about 20 hours per week with their friends (while awake; Table 10.1, ABS Time Use Survey 2006). Females and males spend almost equal amounts of time with friends on average (24 and 25 hours per week respectively). The time young people spend with friends, however, varies across a number of other important factors relating to young people. Table 10.1 reports the average time young people spend with friends based on these characteristics.

Age, living arrangements, geographic location and disability

On average, teenagers and young people living with their parents spend around 10 more hours with friends than young adults and those who do not live with parents (ABS Time Use Survey, 2006; Table 10.1). Although smaller, there are also differences in time between young people who live in and outside of major cities (with those living outside of major cities spending almost 5 hours less with friends per week) and who have and do not have a disability (with those with disability spending around 4 hours less per week with friends) (ABS Time Use Survey, 2006; Table 10.1). Given young people with disability also spend more hours alone (Table 10.1), they are at particular risk of social isolation.

Main activity

Whether young people are in work, education, both or neither has some bearing on the time they spend with friends. On average, young people who engage in paid work only spend less time with their friends (18 hours per week) than young people who only study (31 hours) or who combine paid work and study (26 hours) (ABS Time Use Survey, 2006). This is likely to be related to the amount of free time young people have, but also because young people in education are likely to be friends with those who attend the same educational institution.

Young people who neither study nor work spent the same amount of time with friends as those who are in paid work only (18 hours). This is a result of the high number of hours many of these young people spend with family, most likely caring for children. But it may also be related to the fact that these young people may have difficulty maintaining friendships when they are out of the education system and workforce.

10.3 Intimate relationships

Shanahan and Elliott (2009) found that the nature and importance of intimate relationships changes for most young people as they grow older. Initially, intimate relationships are casual and short-term, although more committed relationships can develop over time. For younger people, friendships are usually more important than intimate relationships and where intimate relationships do exist, the focus is on having fun:

I don't really care about having a boyfriend, but having close friends around me is important.
(Female, 15–17 years, metropolitan)

For 18–24-year-olds intimate relationships are more common, although the experiences of individuals can differ markedly. As shown in Table 4.1 on page 28, 2 per cent of 12–19-year-olds and 20 per cent of 20–24-year-olds live with a partner. Further information about sexual relationships is included in Section 12.5.

10.4 Sport and leisure activities

This report has already looked at the time young people spend in education and employment related activities which together comprise a substantial amount of time in the lives of young people. Leisure is another activity that young people spend a lot of time engaged in and is strongly linked to socialising and spending time with friends.

Table 10.2 reports the hours per week young people 15–24 years spend on leisure activities. It also reports the proportion of young people who undertook these activities as one of their 'main' activities during the ABS Time Use Survey collection period. It is important to recognise that these proportions are likely to under-represent the proportion of young people who regularly or irregularly participate in these activities.

The vast majority of young people participate in some leisure activity (97%) averaging close to 35 hours per week in total. Leisure activities span a broad range and the manner in which young people choose to spend this time is often at the centre of controversy in terms of anti-social behaviour and risk-taking behaviour including, though not restricted to, the excessive consumption of alcohol (see Section 12 for further information on young people and risk taking).

The ABS Time Use Survey (2006) shows that the most time consuming leisure activity young people 15–24 years engage in is watching TV and other passive media, with an average of about 18 hours per week or roughly 2.5 hours per day. Concentrating on those who do participate in this activity (85%), the average is about 3 hours per day (Table 10.2). Focus groups with young people reveal that young people also engage in passive recreational activities as a form of relaxation:

My leisure time now is more vegging out, spacing out, just switch off and sit in front of the TV and not even really take anything in. I probably should use my time more productively, but I don't.
(Female, 22–24 years)

I need to mentally switch off on the weekend. I need not to think. I need to just stare at the TV and do nothing. (Female, 22–24 years, metropolitan).

Another form of passive leisure is playing computer games, which one tenth of young people do for an average of 15 hours per week (Table 10.2).

Table 10.2: Average hours per week in a variety of leisure activities, participation rates, and the average for those participating for young people 15–24 years

	Average hours per week (all)	Proportion of young people engaging in the activity (%)	Average hours per week (participants)
TV and other passive leisure	17.8	85	20.9
Other/Unspecified leisure	4.9	58	8.4
Sport and outdoor activities	3.1	26	12.0
Computer games	1.5	10	14.9
Socialising	1.7	13	13.7
Reading	1.2	16	7.5
Drinking alcohol	1.2	8	15.8
Entertainments/sports events	1.1	7	15.8
Arts, crafts and hobbies	0.9	8	11.0
Games	0.3	3	9.4
Total	33.8	97	34.9

Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

Young people average just over 1 hour in reading, and just less than 1 hour in arts and craft type activities. The proportion of young people who read is higher (16%) than the proportion of young people who engage in arts and crafts (8%), but those that engage in the latter average 11 hours per week compared with 7.5 hours per week for reading (Table 10.2).³⁷ Findings from Mission Australia's 2008 survey showed that more young Australians are generally participating in leisure activities than the ABS Time Use Survey showed (Mission Australia, 2008).

Sport and exercise

Physical activity is important for maintaining good physical and mental health (Department of Health and Ageing, 1999; AIHW, 2007). The National Physical Activity Guidelines recommend at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise every day for young people aged 12–18 years (Department of Health and Ageing, 2004) and at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most days for adults aged 18 years and over (Department of Health and Ageing, 1999). Moderate activities may include brisk walking, bike riding, skateboarding and dancing, while vigorous activities include football, netball, soccer, running, aerobics and swimming (Department of Health and Ageing, 1999).

The ABS Time Use Survey (2006) demonstrates that on any given day approximately one quarter of young people spend their 'main' leisure time engaging in sport and outdoor activities. On average, these young people are spending 12 hours per week in sport. This survey only shows the proportion of young people who consider sport as one of their 'main' leisure activities.

³⁷ A relatively small proportion (8%) of young people 15–24 years state that one of their main leisure activities is drinking alcohol and those that do average just less than 16 hours per week consuming alcohol. Alcohol consumption is discussed in further detail in Section 12.1.

According to the ABS 2004–05 National Health Survey, a large proportion of young people engage in some physical activity. As shown in Table 10.3, over a two week period, 73 per cent of young people 15–24 years had exercised. However, only 39% had participated in moderate to high levels of exercise. Young people who had undertaken moderate to high levels of exercise were more likely to be males, or young people engaged in paid work or education. In addition, young people 15–19 years who exercise are most likely to be born in Australia and live in a household that speaks English. Therefore females, those not in work or education and young people who live in households where English is not spoken are less likely to be highly physically active.³⁸

Table 10.3: Proportion of young people 15–24 years participating in physical activity over a two week period

Level of exercise	Male 15–24 years %	Female 15–24 years %	Total 15–24 years %
Moderate to high (More than 1,600 mins)	46.3	30.3	38.5
Low (100 mins to less than 1,600 mins)	30.6	38.1	34.3
Sedentary (no exercise to less than 100 mins)	23.1	31.6	27.3

Source: ABS 2004–2005 National Health Survey

Data from the 2005–06 Multi-Purpose Household Survey (ABS, 2007) shows some of the main reasons for non-participation and low level participation in physical activity (see Table 10.4). The primary constraints identified by 15–24-year-olds were lack of interest and insufficient time due to work and/or study:

There’s not enough time. School and work take up everything basically. You’re at school Monday to Friday and then Saturday and Sunday you’re working. ... And school tires you out. ... So you don’t even have enough energy to go to the gym or exercise or anything.
(Female, 15–17 years, metropolitan)

A further constraint identified by Shanahan and Elliott (2009) in focus groups was a lack of recreational facilities in rural areas:

If we want to do something like that, we’ve got to go to [the closest regional town].
(Female, 15–17 years, rural)

The main motivators for participating in sport were identified as health/fitness, enjoyment and social/family:

I just do it to stay fit and healthy, because I notice that when I go to the gym I’m just a happier person ... for me it’s more of a health issue. (Female, 18–21 years, metropolitan)

Some young people in the focus groups admitted that they only participated in sport or exercise to improve their body image. They were not undertaking these activities for their health.

³⁸ Results based on logit regression of a sample of 2882 young people aged 15–24 years. Dependent variable indicates whether young person 15–24 years engages in a high level of exercise. Independent variables are age, gender, main activity status, born overseas and speaks English or not, living in a major city or not, household type, and whether the young person smokes or not. Sample response weights are applied. Results with a P value below .05, at least, are regarded as statistically significant.

Table 10.4: Main constraints and motivators for participating in sport and recreation

Main constraint	15–17 years %	18–24 years %
Not interested	47.0	25.0
Insufficient time due to work/study	28.4	39.7
Already active	6.2	6.9
Ongoing injury/illness	5.8	7.2
Insufficient time due to family	2.2	7.0
Other	10.5	14.3
Main motivator		
Enjoyment	45.3	29.6
Health/fitness	25.9	45.5
Social/family	11.6	9.8
Competition/challenge	6.8	3.2
Well-being	3.1	4.5
Weight loss	2.9	4.0
Other	4.3	3.3

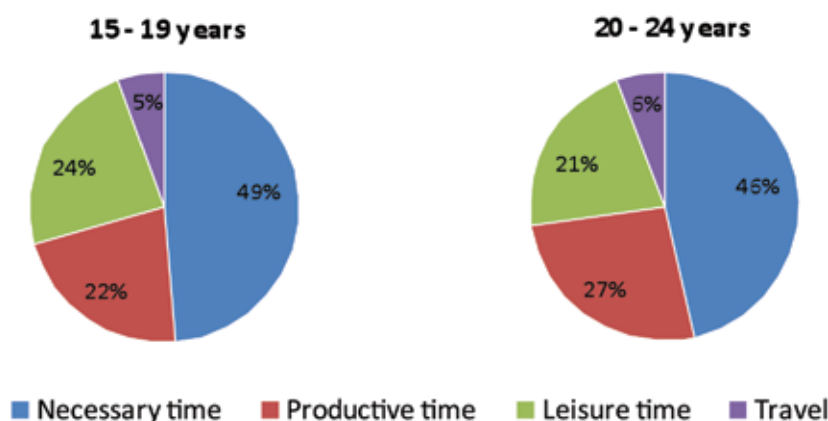
Source: ABS 2005-06 Multi-Purpose Household Survey

Note: Figures may not add due to rounding.

Leisure, work and study

In total, leisure time accounts for approximately 24 per cent of 15–19-year-olds time and 21 per cent of 20–24-year-olds time (Figure 10.1). As productive time increases (work, education and caring), leisure time decreases. This is reflected in the fact that the proportion of young people who nominate 'insufficient time due to work/study' as their main constraint to participating in sport and recreation increases from 28 per cent for young people aged 15–17 years to 40 per cent for 18–24-year-olds. Similarly, the proportion of those who nominate health and fitness as their main motivating factors increases from 26 per cent for 15–17-year-olds to 46 per cent for 18–24-year-olds.

Figure 10.1: How young people spend their time³⁹



Source: ABS Time Use Survey 2006

³⁹ Necessary time includes sleep, personal care and eating; productive time includes paid work, domestic work and care, education and voluntary work; leisure time includes items specified in Table 10.2, plus time spent shopping, in church and in community participation.

There are clear relationships between young people's participation in education and work and the types of leisure they undertake. Young people enrolled in education and who are also in paid work average less leisure time (watching TV, reading and playing games) than those young people who are only engaged in education.

Young people 15–24 years not in paid work or education spend more time in leisure activities, which is mostly composed of more time watching TV. These young people, however, also spend significantly more time on art and creative activities.

While educational attainment has very little impact upon young people's leisure patterns, gender and income has some influence. Females and young people with higher personal income spend less time in leisure activities. This is most likely associated with increased domestic activities for women and increased time in paid work for young people with higher personal incomes.

Leisure, sport and disability

Young people with disability not enrolled in education average significantly more time playing computer games. This is perhaps associated with a sedentary lifestyle that may be related to certain physical disabilities, but it should be stressed that there is no significant difference in terms of time spent in sport or exercise between young people overall and young people with disability.

Leisure and cultural diversity

Young people 15–19 years not enrolled in education, who were born overseas and do not speak English at home average less time on entertainment, arts and games. This may reflect an aversion to leisure activities that require the use or understanding of English.

For young people 15–24 years who are in education, were born overseas and who live in households where some language other than English is spoken, less time is spent drinking alcohol and in other unspecified leisure activities.

10.5 Volunteering

How many young people volunteer?

According to the General Social Survey (2006), almost one in three young people 18–24 years (30%) did some unpaid voluntary work over a period of one year. This compares with 37 per cent for the working age population (25–64 years) and 27 per cent for adults aged 65 years and over.

Overall, the volunteering rate among 18–24-year-olds has increased over time. Between 1995 and 2006 the rate increased from 17 per cent to just over 30 per cent, a rise that was similar for both sexes.⁴⁰ However, the length of time young men spent volunteering (their median annual hours) decreased between 1995 and 2006, from 64 hours to 40, whereas the annual hours young women spent remained steady – 60 hours in 1995, 58 in 2000, and 60 in 2006 (ABS, 2007: 74, Table A2).

Although almost one in three young people did some volunteering throughout the year, volunteering for most young people is not a very frequent activity. The ABS Time Use Survey (2006) showed that about 4 per cent of young people 15–24 years spent time volunteering (an average of 11 hours a week) on the days they recorded information about their time use. Therefore while young people volunteer, the proportion of young people who volunteer regularly is likely to be low.

⁴⁰ ABS, 2007: 74, Table A2. See also: Boese and Scutella, 2006: 31; McCabe et al., 2007; Collin, 2008.

Low levels of volunteering are also reflected in the focus groups with young people (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009). Very few of the young people said that they were involved in volunteering:

I suppose some people might get involved, but not me. I've got better things to do.

(Male, 15–17 years, Brisbane)

Young people in the focus groups who did get involved volunteered in a range of areas: working 'at drug shelters and with homeless people', fundraising, assisting at community events and working for specific organisations in an unpaid capacity, such as the St John Ambulance. A number of young people volunteer as part of a sporting commitment, by coaching sporting teams, sitting on sport club committees and refereeing or umpiring sporting matches.

Which young people volunteer?

Young people who are female, in education and paid work, who completed Year 12, who live outside of major cities and who speak English at home are most likely to volunteer. Those who give money to charity are also likely to volunteer.

Gender

Data from the General Social Survey (2006) shows no significant differences between the proportion of young males and females who volunteer. A study of the 1995 and 1998 Year 9 LSAY cohorts, however, did find that gender significantly contributed to volunteering, with females spending more time volunteering compared to males.

Education and paid work

Education is strongly linked to volunteering. Young people 18–24 years in education only, or who combine education with paid work are significantly more likely to volunteer than young people 18–24 who engage in paid work only.⁴¹ For example, 18–24-year-old students were more than twice as likely to be volunteering as their non-studying counterparts (43% and 20% respectively; ABS, 2007).

Similarly, focus groups by Shanahan and Elliott (2009) found that young people were more likely to volunteer if they were currently at school, particularly high school. Much of the volunteering that these young people participated in was encouraged and supported by the school during school hours:

We did some stuff through school, where we helped out at drug shelters and with homeless people. I think you can relate to that, and it makes you really appreciate your life and what you have. (Male, 15–17 years)

Yeah, like we raised money for the hospital. It took up school time, so it was good.

(Male, 18–21 years)

With young people in education only, additional time available may be one factor in their higher propensity to volunteer, particularly if the volunteering is during school hours. However, as previously shown, young people who combine paid work and education spend a similar amount of time in these activities as young people who are in paid work only. Therefore, volunteering is not a case of simply having more time to volunteer. Another indication of the positive relationship between education and volunteering is that young people who have completed Year 12 are significantly more likely to volunteer than young people who have not completed Year 12. In contrast to the strong correlation between education and volunteering, there is no significant association between educational attainment and engagement with a group (see Section 10.6).

⁴¹ Results are based on a logistic regression of a sample of 1174 young people aged 18–24 years. Dependent variable indicates whether young person 18–24 years volunteered in the previous 12 months. Independent variables are gender, main activity status, living with parents or not, with disability or not, completed Year 12 or not, born overseas and speaks English or not, donates money or not, living in a major city or not. Sample response weights are applied. Results with a P value below .05, at least, are regarded as statistically significant.

As a measure on its own, paid work may also increase the likelihood of volunteering. There are indications that those who are employed are more likely to volunteer (31%) than those who are unemployed (26%) or not in the labour force (25%), although the calculated percentage for the unemployed is not a reliable indicator. Young people in paid employment are more likely to be volunteering if they are working part-time than full-time (36% and 28% respectively; ABS, 2007).

Geography

The geographic area young people live in may also impact on their likelihood to volunteer. Young people who do not live in major cities are more likely to volunteer than those who do, but the association is only mildly significant ($p < 0.1$). This does suggest, however, that there may be a negative relationship between the size of the community and the likelihood that young people will become more involved in it. Similarly, Brown et al., (2003) found young people living in non-metropolitan areas were more likely to volunteer in terms of frequency and duration.

Language

In addition to geography and education, language spoken at home can also affect a young person's propensity to volunteer. Young people who are born overseas and who do not speak English as a main language at home are significantly less likely to be volunteers. This suggests that there may be potential language barriers for finding out about and/or undertaking volunteering opportunities. Finally, there is a significant positive correlation between donating money to charity and volunteering, which is not surprising.

Socio economic status

LSAY found higher socio economic status was connected with higher levels of volunteering. They maintained this was because of higher access to print media, which itself is connected with higher levels of volunteering and may be connected to higher levels of education. Furthermore, they found that young people's propensity to volunteer also increased if their fathers were employed (Brown et al., 2003).

Age

It is not possible to understand the difference between volunteer rates of 12–18-year-olds compared to 19–24-year-olds using ABS data. However, according to findings from Mission Australia's National Survey of Young Australians, young adult respondents (20–24 years) were much more likely than 11–19-year-olds to be involved in volunteer activities. Nearly two-fifths (38%) of 20–24-year-olds who responded to their survey were involved in volunteer activities, compared with 18 per cent of 11–14-year-olds and 25 per cent of 15–19-year-olds (Mission Australia, 2008).⁴²

Similarly, a survey of 121 Australian undergraduate psychology university students also found high volunteer rates among 12–25-year-olds: 42 per cent were recent volunteers and 74 per cent had volunteered at some time in the past. The volunteer activities of participants included: sports coaching/assistance (23%); religious activities (19%); fundraising (8%); assisting the elderly (8%); tutoring without pay (6%); babysitting (4%); arts (4%); clerical (4%); cleaning (2%); environmental (2%); and animal welfare (2%). An 'other' category (19%) included working in youth groups and women's shelters, online forum moderation and surf life-saving (McCabe et al., 2007).

⁴² The self selective sampling method and the fact that the survey was conducted by a non-profit organisation may have increased the number of respondents who reported engaging in volunteering.

Why do young people volunteer?

Young people express a wide variety of reasons for volunteering. Most commonly, young people say they volunteer to help others or the community (53% of those who volunteer). Other common reasons are for personal satisfaction (43%), to do something worthwhile (38%), or because of personal or family reasons (29%) (Table 10.5).

Table 10.5: Reasons young people 18–24 years volunteer

Reason for volunteering	Proportion of young people 18–24 years who volunteer (%)
Help others/community	53
Personal satisfaction	43
To do something worthwhile	38
Personal/family involvement	29
Religious belief	19
Social contact	16
To be active	15
To learn new skills	14
Use skills/experience	13
Gain work experience	9
Felt obliged	7
Other	4
Just happened	1

Notes: Young people could state more than one reason for volunteering; Population weights applied

Source: General Social Survey 2006

A study of volunteering by young people aged 16–24 years (Ferrier et al., 2004)⁴³ found additional reasons for volunteering. These included ‘compulsory community service’, role models, previous volunteering experience, and advertising (Ferrier et al., 2004).

Some young people in the focus groups gave reasons for not volunteering. These were mainly related to a lack of time and/or a lack of awareness about volunteering opportunities available and of interest to them in their community:

I’d like to help out, but I don’t have time. (Female, 18–21 years)

I haven’t heard of anything around the community that we could be involved in.
(Female, 15–17 years)

43 The study included material from LSAY and two surveys from Victorian TAFEs [VET providers], as well as discussions with young people themselves and interviews with community leaders and volunteer organisations.

Compulsory ‘volunteering’

Volunteering can have substantial benefits (Ferrier et al., 2004), but do these benefits occur when volunteering is mandatory? Research investigating the question of whether or not compulsory volunteer-type programs helped young people develop active citizenship (Warburton and Smith, 2003) found that on the whole they did not. This research showed that giving young people choice and a sense of agency is important if they are going to benefit from volunteering. Furthermore, when volunteering is related to work experience, it is important that the experience helps develop skills for future paid employment (Warburton and Smith, 2003). Young people who participated in the focus groups were positive about undertaking volunteer work experience as a pathway to gaining paid work:

It’d be good to do job trials, so that you are able to show that you’re a good worker – it would be good for people who want to work but don’t have any certificates to show them qualifications.
(Male, 15-17 years)

Thus, being given the choice to volunteer may be a crucial aspect of volunteering if young people are to benefit from it.

10.6 Civic engagement

What is civic engagement and how civically engaged are young people?

Civic engagement is a key aspect of social capital. It encompasses a wide range of discrete activities such as writing a letter to the editor of a local paper, contacting a member of parliament, taking part in a protest march, or buying ‘fair-trade’ coffee. It also includes a more sustained engagement in groups with a wide variety of aims relating to social, community or environmental issues.

Any form of civic engagement is tacitly based on the assumption that individual actions can make a difference and are, therefore, worth the effort. One might associate this with an idealistic view of the world and in turn with young people, but if anything, young people in 2006 were found to be slightly less likely to engage in civic activities than older people. This finding is supported by young people’s comments in the focus groups by Shanahan and Elliott (2009). Young people showed little interest in civic engagement and associated this involvement with older people:

It’s not for us, it’s for people like the old guy who lives next door to us. (Male, 15–17 years)

The young people also talked about being engaged in ‘their own’ (youth) community rather than with the more general ‘adult’ community because they did not feel a part of it. Young people were more likely to talk about community in terms of their peers around them. This may be one of the reasons for lack of civic engagement by young people:

Kids end up forming their own community because they don’t want to be part of the adult community. It tells them what they should be, what they want to be, politicians say, “you kids, you drink, you drive dangerously, you this, you that”. It ends up where you don’t have community involvement between young people and the rest of the community because they don’t feel like they’re part of that community until you’re 18. (Male, 18–21 years)

Despite these misgivings, some young people are civically engaged through a range of activities. Table 10.6 shows the proportion of young people 18–24 years, compared with older adults, who reported engaging in a variety of civic activities in the General Social Survey (2006).

Table 10.6: Distribution of types of civic engagement activities over the period of a year among people 18–24 years, 25–64 years, and 65 years and over

Type of civic engagement activity	18–24 years	25–64 years	65 years and over
	%	%	%
Signed petition	19	25	15
Ethical consumption	17	27	18
Write letter to council/territory government	5	16	13
Protest march	4	6	2
Attended public meeting/consultation	3	9	8
Contact MP	2	6	6
Letter to newspaper editor	2	4	3
Political campaign	1	2	1

Source: General Social Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

The two most common forms of civic engagement were the same for 18–24-year-olds and other adults: signing a petition and ethical consumption. A higher proportion of people 25–64 years engaged in both these activities than either young people 18–24 years or older people 65 years and over. The proportions for young people and older Australians are quite similar. A much lower proportion of young people 18–24 years contacted members of local or state/territory government than either people aged 25–64 years or those 65 years and over. A similar pattern is evident for contact with federal politicians (MP), which was generally lower for all age groups.

Which young people are most civically engaged?

Young women tend to be more engaged in civic activities than young men (see Table 10.7). This is evident across all types of civic engagement. For example, 22 per cent of young women (18–24 years) signed a petition during the year compared with 16 per cent of young men. In addition, 20 per cent of young women had engaged in some form of ethical consumption compared with 15 per cent of young men.

Table 10.7: Distribution of types of civic engagement activities over the period of a year among young men and women 18–24 years in Australia

Type of civic engagement activity	Male	Female
	18–24 years %	18–24 years %
Signed petition	16	22
Ethical consumption	15	20
Protest march	4	4
Write letter to council/territory government	3	6
Public meeting/consultation	2	3
Contact MP	2	2
Letter to newspaper editor	2	2
Political campaign	1	2

Source: General Social Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

Young people who combined paid work with study were most likely to engage in civic activities, while young people who were neither in paid work nor studying were the least likely.⁴⁴ Those who lived with their parents were less likely to engage in these activities than those who did not live in the parental home. Young people who were not born in Australia were less likely to participate than Australian-born young people. This latter result was particularly strong if English was not the main language spoken at home. Young people who had not completed Year 12 were less likely to engage in these types of activities, while those who had donated money and who did not live in a major city were more likely to be civically engaged. Not surprisingly, these patterns are very similar to those found in relation to volunteering.

Young people can also become civically engaged by becoming involved in organisations related to social, political, community or environmental issues, although their involvement in groups organised around these specific issues is much lower than their engagement in discrete activities like signing a petition (see Table 10.8 and 'Voting' section below). The groups young people were most likely to be involved in were trade unions (or professional organisations), environmental groups and human rights groups. Young men were more likely to be involved in trade unions (5%) than young women (2%), while young women were more likely to be involved in human rights groups (3%) than young men (1%). An equal proportion of young men and women were involved in environmental groups (4%).

Although there were clear differences between the types of groups the young men engaged in and those the young women joined, there is no significant difference between the sexes in overall engagement in groups.⁴⁵ However, young people who lived with their parents were significantly less likely to be involved in one of these groups. Young people who were not born in Australia and did speak English as a main language at home were significantly more likely to engage with a group. This may reflect the importance of such groups in helping those young Australians who were not born here to become more involved in society. It also indicates that English is important in facilitating this. It is interesting to note that there is no significant association between educational attainment and engagement with a group. This finding contrasts with the findings in relation to volunteering and to the discrete activities listed in Table 10.7. Education is strongly linked to volunteering and targeted civic activities like signing a petition or writing a letter to newspaper editor.

44 Results are based on a logistic regression on a sample of 1174 young people 18-24 years. The dependent variable is whether or not a young person 18-24 years engaged in any of these activities in the previous 12 months. Independent variables are main activity status, living with parents or not, with disability or not, completed Year 12 or not, born overseas and speaks English or not, donates money or not, living in a major city or not. Sample response weights are applied. Results with a P value below .05, at least, are regarded as statistically significant.

45 See above for details of methodology, which is identical except for the dependent variable. The dependent variable here is engagement in any of the civic/government groups listed in Table 10.8.

Table 10.8: Distribution of engagement of young people 18–24 years in specific civic/governance groups

Types of civic/governance groups	Male 18–24 years %	Female 18–24 years %	Total 18–24 years %
Trade union, Professional/technical association	5	2	3
Political party	1	1	1
Civic group/organisation	1	2	1
Environment, animal welfare	4	4	4
Human rights	1	3	2
Body Corporate/ tenants association	1	1	1
Consumer organisation	0	1	0
Other	1	0	0

Source: General Social Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

Young people's civic engagement can also take the form of involvement in community-based groups. In this case, there is some blurring of the distinction between volunteering and civic engagement, and it is important to bear that in mind. Table 10.9 reports the proportion of young men and women who were engaged in a variety of social or community groups in Australia in 2006.

The most common type of group was one relating to education or training, with 13 per cent of young people reporting that they had participated in this type of group. The next most common type of group related to parenting and children. A much higher proportion of young women participated in these types of groups (14%) than young men (4%). Young women also tended to be more involved in welfare groups, health promotion and support, and service clubs. In contrast, a higher proportion of young men were involved with the emergency services (4%) than young women (2%); (Table 10.9).

Engagement in these types of groups was quite different from engagement in the civic/government type groups.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, young women were much more likely than young men to engage in these types of groups, a finding which is most likely associated with their engagement in groups related to parenting and children. Young people in education (either combined with paid work or not) are more likely to be engaged in one of these types of groups, a reflection of the results shown in Table 10.9 pointing to the prevalence of groups associated with education and training.

⁴⁶ See note 44 for details of methodology, which is identical except for the dependent variable. The dependent variable here is engagement in any of the social/community groups listed in Table 10.9.

Table 10.9: Distribution of engagement of young people 18–24 years in specific community-based/ social groups

Types of community/social groups	Male 18–24 years %	Female 18–24 years %	Total 18–24 years %
Service clubs	1	5	3
Welfare organisations	2	8	5
Education and training	11	14	13
Parenting / children / youth	4	14	8
Health promotion and support	3	6	4
Emergency Services	4	2	3
International aid and development	4	4	4
Other community support groups	0	0	0

Source: General Social Survey 2006

Note: Population weights applied

Voting

According to data from the Australian Electoral Commission (cited in Edwards et al., 2006), around four in every five young people 18–25 years vote. An estimated 300,000 Australians aged 18 to 25 years do not vote in elections because they have not enrolled (Edwards et al., 2005). Only 80 per cent are enrolled, in comparison with 95 per cent of the eligible voting-age population (see also: Boese and Scutella, 2006).

Survey respondents and focus group participants in the Youth Electoral Study (YES)⁴⁷ clearly identified parents as a major source of information about politics and voting, with newspapers being the next most frequently cited source of information. Parents were also identified as instrumental in motivating their children to enrol. However, many of the children considered that their parents did not have adequate resources either to inform them or to help them enrol. The researchers commented that, in such cases, ‘the issue may be building the resource base of parents’ (Edwards et al., 2006: 27).

While the YES participants usually referred to ‘parents’ when they were talking about who was most helpful in facilitating their enrolment, it was usually mothers who took on the responsibility for ensuring that their children filled out the enrolment forms. Fathers were sometimes mentioned as well (and once a grandfather), but mothers were more active than any other family member, even to the extent of completing the whole process up to the point where the enrollee simply had to sign the form (Edwards et al., 2006: 24).

Edwards (2007) identifies two key themes/assumptions about young people and voting in the policy literature: that more and better education will increase youth electoral participation; and that young people are apathetic and ill-informed about civic matters. But although there is a participation gap between younger and older voters, this gap increases when young people are in various ways disadvantaged or marginalised, thus indicating that youth alone is not the only factor causing the gap. Findings from the YES led Edwards (2007) to conclude that it is the electoral system itself that constructs barriers to participation by marginalising young people’s interests and issues, and hence failing to represent them adequately. The YES findings indicate that most young people are not active resisters. Rather, they

⁴⁷ http://www.aec.gov.au/about_aec/publications/youth_study/youth_study_3/page01.htm

do not enrol to vote for other, structural reasons, including missing the window of opportunity to register and not having a stable address. For disadvantaged young people, their lack of interest in enrolling or voting may simply mean that they ‘had other things to worry about’, such as finding the resources to live (Edwards, 2007).

The YES study found that citizenship education in Australian schools was at best only marginally successful, judged on the basis of students’ lack of knowledge of political and electoral matters in their final year of high school. Moreover, there is evidence that around 380,000 young Australians aged 18–25 years are not on the electoral roll (Print, 2007: 333). Nonetheless, Print (2007) argues, schools are very important, and indeed essential, agents in the process of improving the democratic participation of young people. They can do this both formally – through specific courses in citizenship education – and informally – through encouraging student participation in extra-curricular activities such as school newspapers or debating.

Research carried out by the Whitlam Institute at the University of Western Sydney, involving focus groups with 18–25-year-olds (Horsley and Costley, 2008), found that the young people had a broad knowledge of how the political system worked in Australia, and of democratic society more generally. But they did not feel that the present system encouraged their participation or valued it or offered adequate opportunities to contribute. They did not strongly identify with traditional political institutions, seeing them as complex and not conducive to meaningful participation. This did not mean that they were either apathetic or disengaged. Most of them were involved in community and local activities, and in issues transcending local and community activity – protests, running campaigns, standing for office, organising political delegations. They felt that this was an important contribution they were making to the Australian democratic system but expressed frustration that their involvement had not achieved what they had intended, and said that they felt excluded from participating in decision-making processes (Horsley and Costley, 2008). The research found that young people in Australia are engaged with political and social issues, but it also found that they find conventional party politics alienating and are reluctant to participate in formal political institutions (Collin, 2008: 20).

A study commissioned by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) (Bell et al., 2008), which researched participation approaches on the part of young people aged 12–25 years from diverse backgrounds – Indigenous, CALD, low SES, disability, and out-of-home care – found that there had not been widespread involvement of young people from those backgrounds in decision-making processes in government, schools and communities, despite official support for their involvement.

Environment

Most of the research into young people’s attitudes towards the environment finds that youth are interested in environmental issues, although the nature and degree of the interest depends on what questions are asked. The National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS), a cooperative funding program between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments, investigated methods for empowering young Australians to become agents of change for sustainable consumption, both with the aim of leading to a more sustainable society, and as an ideal entry point into a range of youth development activities and interrelated issues affecting young people. Part of the research involved a Youth and Sustainable Consumption Survey of 224 young Australians aged between 12 and 28 years. The survey found that the vast majority of respondents (88.8%) either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that young people ‘buy too much stuff’. However, while most respondents said they had a lot of control over their consumption behaviour, there was a large minority (44%) who said they had only ‘a little’ control or none at all (Bentley et al., 2004).

The researchers commented that the results of the survey did indicate that young people in Australia could become agents for change towards sustainability in patterns of consumption. But developing this potential requires programs for empowering young people to adopt critical attitudes and acquire the knowledge skills

to inform themselves about the products they buy and about issues of social justice. The report identified a range of techniques whereby young people could become agents for change in their communities, in the areas of: training and education; media; social marketing; networking; civic participation; and political participation (Bentley et al., 2004).

Among the Australian Temperament Project participants, over 80 per cent reported that they had engaged in efforts to care for the environment, but a much smaller proportion said they supported environmental groups (around 15%) and an even smaller proportion had participated in these groups (fewer than 5%) (Smart and Sanson, 2005: 97).

Partridge (2008) notes that a number of attitude polls have found high levels of concern for the environment among young Australians – nine out of ten 12–28-year-olds were either ‘concerned’ or ‘very concerned’; 76 per cent believed the government was not doing enough to protect the environment; 91 per cent of 16–24-year-olds agreed that ‘the threat to the environment is real and must be taken seriously’; and four out of five favoured protecting the environment even if it meant reducing economic growth.

In contrast, research studies comparing young people’s levels of concern with those of older Australians have found that their levels of concern are actually lower; and young people have been consistently found to rank environmental issues low on their lists of priorities. However, this does not mean that young people are unconcerned. Partridge (2008) found a number of examples of environmental action by young people, ranging from individual actions such as recycling or reducing water consumption, through involvement in school-based, site-specific restoration or clean-up projects, to activism, campaigning and lobbying seeking broader social and political change. Partridge (2008) concludes that, while it may not be possible to say with any certainty the extent to which young people are in the vanguard of environmental concern, nonetheless it is clear that they are concerned. The more pressing problem is not the attitudes of the young, but the actions (and inactions) of those of the older generations who are leaving a legacy the young had no part in creating (Partridge, 2008).

Reinforcing Partridge’s research, a study by The Australia Institute drawing on data from a Roy Morgan Research poll found that young Australians were the age group who were the least concerned about environmental problems (Denniss, 2005). The poll interviewed 56,344 respondents aged 14 years and over across Australia from October 2003 to September 2004, and found that only 40 per cent of 14–17-year-olds agreed with the statement, ‘At heart I am an environmentalist’. This proportion is well below the national average of 66 per cent. The author surmised that this apparent limited interest in environmentalism could be caused by youth itself and that this generation would become more interested as they got older. However, although the 14–17-year-olds were also the age group who were least likely to agree with other statements about the environment, most of them did in fact agree. Over 70 per cent agreed that ‘I try to recycle everything I can’, and around 85 per cent agreed with the statement, ‘If we don’t act now we’ll never control our environmental problems’ (in comparison with 88% in the case of the total survey population) (Denniss, 2005).

Young people’s concern for the environment was reflected in comments made in the focus groups (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009). Many of the young people talked of their concerns about global warming, drought and pollution:

The whole global warming thing has made you more aware of how much you waste.
(Female, 15–17 years)

However, despite being concerned, many of the young people were resigned to feeling like they could not change things concerning the environment:

Climate change and global warming and that stuff is getting a bit worrying. I leave it up to the people who are paid to do it. (Female, 18–21 years)

But we can't do anything. The Government has to do something, they have to be stricter on people. (Males, 15–17 years)

Yeah, look at coal factories and that. They're polluting the air. I can't stop that or do anything about it. (Female, 18–21 years)

10.7 Religion

Religion is another area of community involvement for a number of young people. It is not only a spiritual commitment, but can also form part of a social activity, a civic engagement, and/or volunteering opportunity.

Are young people religious?

Two different measures were used to determine how religious young people in Australia are: the 2006 Census, and HILDA. The first was used to identify young people's religious affiliations; the second to assess the importance young people attribute to religion (from HILDA).

Affiliation

A diverse range of religious affiliations were reported by Australian young people (12–24 years) in the 2006 Census (Table 10.10). Almost two-thirds acknowledged a religious affiliation, while 23 per cent reported no religion and the remaining 13 per cent did not specify any. There was a predominance of Christian denominations, with about 58 per cent identifying as Christian. Of these, Catholics and Anglicans were the two largest denominations, as they are for the Australian population in general. The largest non-Christian religious affiliation specified was Islam.

Table 10.10: Religious affiliation for young people 12–24 years in Australia

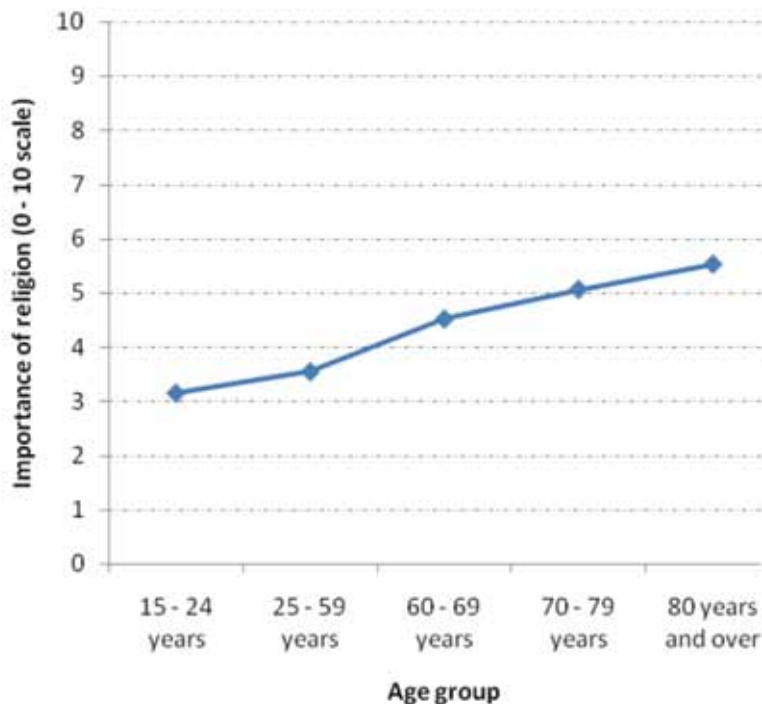
	Number of young people 12–24 years	Percentage of young people 12–24 years
Catholic	927,400	26
No Religion	798,900	23
Anglican	502,200	14
Not defined	460,800	13
Other Christian	172,700	5
Uniting Church	175,100	5
Baptist	54,400	2
Greek Orthodox	55,600	2
Other Religions	69,300	2
Buddhism	75,400	2
Islam	78,100	2
Lutheran	39,200	1
Pentecostal	46,700	1
Presbyterian	51,400	1
Total	3,507,200	100

Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing

Importance of religion

So how important is religion for young Australians and how does this compare with older Australians? Figure 10.2 shows the average level of reported importance of religion for different age groups on a scale from 0 (one of the least important things in my life) to 10 (the most important thing in my life). On average in 2007, young Australians (15–24 years in the HILDA) were more likely than any other age group to give a low importance to religion. Religion is clearly more important for people in older age groups, suggesting either a generational shift or the increasing importance of religion as people age.⁴⁸

Figure 10.2: The importance of religion to Australians across different age groups (0-10 scale)



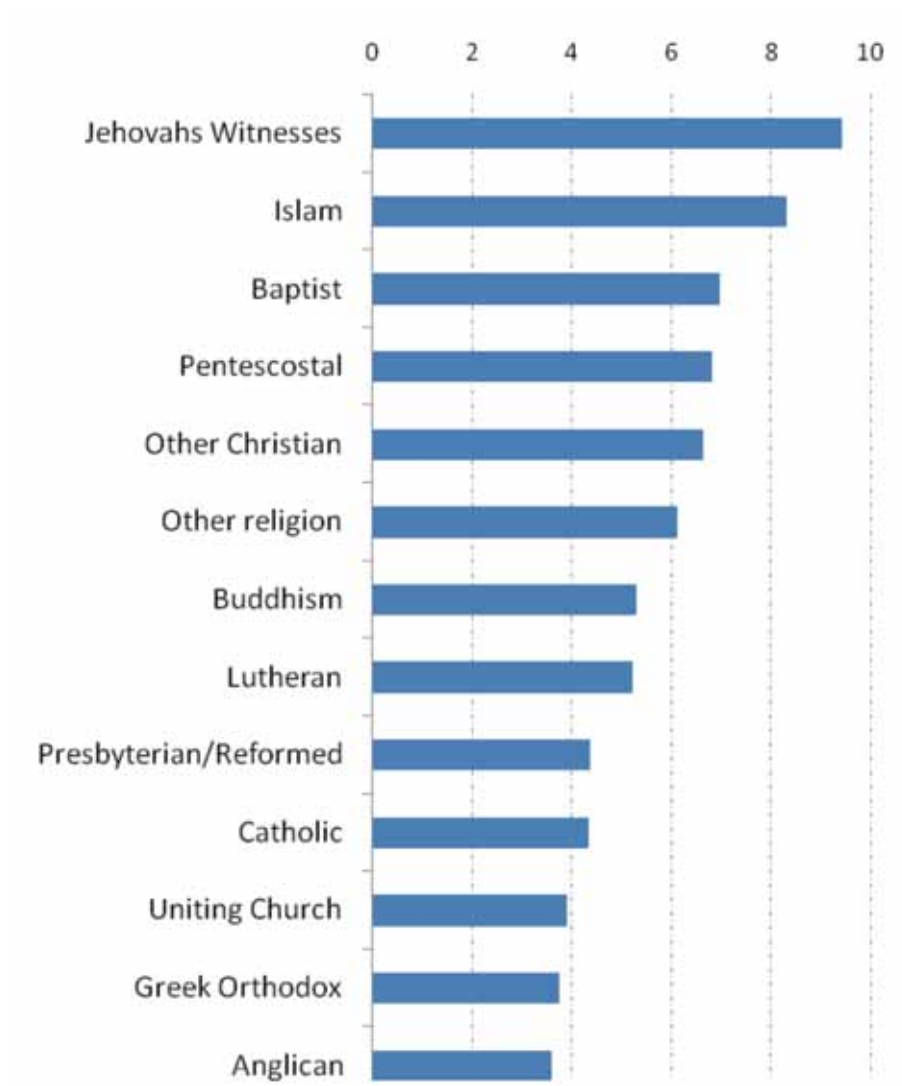
Source: HILDA 2007

Note: Population weights applied

An overall assessment of the importance of religion of 3.2 (out of 10) masks considerable variation between young people depending on which religion they belong to. Figure 10.3 shows the average score of the importance of religion for 15–24-year-olds across a selection of different religious affiliations. About half the young people who stated a religious affiliation were either Anglican or Catholic, and that explains why the overall rating of the importance of religion is so low – both those denominations recorded very low levels of importance. For some young people, however, religion is very important. Young Jehovah’s Witnesses and young Muslims both regarded religion as very important (often the most important thing in their lives). These young people represent a significant minority among Australia’s youth. An additional group of young people with a very high score were those affiliated with the Salvation Army (9 out of 10), but they also represented a very small group.

⁴⁸ In the absence of an extensive panel or cohort data set following individuals over their lives, it is not possible to say which of these hypotheses is correct.

Figure 10.3: Ratings of the importance of religion for young people 15–24 years in Australia across different religious affiliations



Source: HILDA 2007

Note: Population weights applied

Spirituality

Taking religion in a broader sense than membership of a particular denomination, a research study in Victoria investigated 16–20-year-olds' perceptions of their spiritual well-being (de Souza et al., 2004). The study found that, for the 16–24-year-old participants, spiritual well-being was linked to a sense of connectedness that provided them with a sense of self-worth and helped them find meaning and purpose in their everyday lives. While some of the young participants in the study linked their spirituality with a recognised religious tradition, many did not. Instead, they felt that the development of their spiritual lives was more dependent on the positive relationships that they had formed, often from their very earliest years.

The researchers maintained that the study showed a need to provide young people with opportunities for expressing their inner lives and developing their emotional and spiritual sides.

10.8 Conclusion

Social participation is a critical component of young people's lives. It includes their relationships with family, friends and partners, the time they spend taking part in leisure and community based activities and the extent to which they volunteer and get involved in civic activities, like voting or recycling.

Young people, especially those who live at home, spend a substantial proportion of their time with their families and most report having healthy relationships with them. Coupled with friendships, family relationships are critical for young people's social and emotional development.

Young people who neither study nor work spend the most time with their families, which may play a protective role for young people (but only if the relationships are strong, positive and supporting). Young people without family support who do not work or study are likely to be in a precarious position, especially because young people outside of paid work and education spend less time with friends than those involved in education. Also of concern are the 6 per cent of young people who do not have friends and the fact that young people with disability are more socially isolated than their counterparts (i.e. they spend less time with friends and more time alone).

Activities with friends and family have some impact on the types of leisure activities young people engage in. These include passive (TV, internet, reading, entertainment, hobbies) and active (exercise, outdoor activities, sport) activities. While most young people undertake some exercise, less than half engage in the moderate to vigorous exercise recommended. Altogether, leisure activities account for approximately one-quarter of 15–19-year olds' time during the week and one-fifth of 20–24-year-olds' time.

Most of young people's productive time is spent in education and/or work, but they also spend some time volunteering and/or taking part in community based civic activities. Young people who volunteer are most likely to be involved in education and those in paid work are still more likely to volunteer than young people who do not work or study. This demonstrates that a small group of young people are particularly excluded from productive activity. Age, geographic location and SES can also impact on young people's propensity to volunteer.

Similarly, educated young people are also more likely to be involved in civic activities and young people neither in education nor work were least likely to be involved. Participation in civic activities is not overly high among young people in general, but some young people are very proactively involved and engaged. Two of the most common civic activities discussed are voting and, in recent years, looking after the environment. While most young people are enrolled to vote, one in five young people over 18 years are not. Similarly, young people's response to the environment is predominately concern, but young people's views are also surprisingly mixed.

Key points: social participation – family, friends, leisure and community

Family, friends and partners

- Family relationships and the quality of these relationships can have a strong impact on the social and emotional well-being of young people.
- On average, young people spend 40 hours a week with their family and most report having close relationships.
- Factors impacting on the nature of family relationships include gender, age, location and cultural background.
- Friends are an important source of support for young people and they highly value their social networks.
- Most young people (94 per cent) report having friends they can confide in and, on average spend 20 hours per week with their friends.
- Young people who live outside of major cities spend almost 5 hours less with friends per week than those living in metropolitan areas and young people with disability spend around 4 hours less per week with friends than young people generally. Given young people with disability also spend more hours alone, they are at particular risk of social isolation.
- Friends are often more important to young people than intimate relationships, although the nature and importance of intimate relationships grows with age.
- For younger people, friendships are usually more important than intimate relationships. Where intimate relationships exist, the focus is on having fun.
- For 18–24-year-olds intimate relationships are more common, although the experiences of individuals can differ markedly.
- 2 per cent of 12–19-year-olds and 20 per cent of 20–24-year-olds live with a partner.

Leisure activities

- As well as spending time with friends, in education and at work, young people are engaged in a range of leisure activities including, watching TV, playing computer games, reading, entertainment, hobbies and sport and outdoor activities.
- Leisure time accounts for approximately 24 per cent of 15–19-year-olds time and 21 per cent of 20–24-year-olds time, and as productive time increases (work, education and caring), leisure time decreases.
- Over two-thirds of young people engage in some form of physical activity, although less than half engage in moderate to vigorous exercise, as is recommended.
- Factors impacting on participation in physical activity include gender, engagement in work or education, cultural background, disability, interest and time. Educational attainment has very little impact upon young people's leisure patterns.

Volunteering

- Around one in three young people volunteer, but the proportion of young people who volunteer regularly is low.
- Those most likely to volunteer are: women, those in education or paid work, those who completed Year 12, those who live outside of major cities, those who speak English at home, and those who give money to charity.
- Reasons young people give for volunteering include: to help others or the community, personal satisfaction, to do something worthwhile, and personal or family reasons.
- Young people do not believe that compulsory programs qualify as volunteering, and many feel exploited and stigmatised by them.

Civic engagement

- Young people in 2006 were found to be slightly less likely to engage in civic activities than older people.
- For both 18–24-year-olds and older adults, the two most common forms of civic engagement were signing a petition and ethical consumption.
- Young women tend to be somewhat more engaged in civic activities than men.
- Young people combining paid work with study are most likely to engage in civic activities, and young people neither in paid work nor studying are least likely.
- Those who donate money and who live in a major city are more likely to be engaged, while those living with their parents are less likely, as are those not born in Australia, and those who have not completed Year 12.
- Young people's involvement in organisations related to social, political, community or environmental issues is low.
- Only 80 per cent of 18–25-year-olds are enrolled to vote, in comparison with 95 per cent of the eligible population.
- Youth is not the only factor in this comparatively low level of enrolment; disadvantage and marginalisation are relevant as well.
- Most young people say that their parents are their main source of information about voting, especially their mothers.
- Young people have a broad knowledge of the political system and democratic society more generally, but many do not feel valued or encouraged to participate.
- Young people aged 12–25 years from diverse backgrounds – Indigenous, CALD, low SES, disability, and out-of-home care – are not widely involved in decision-making processes, despite official support.
- Most of the research into young people's attitudes towards the environment finds that youth are interested in environmental issues, although the nature and degree of the interest depends on what questions are asked.

Religion

- Almost two-thirds of young Australians aged 12–24 years acknowledged a religious affiliation, 23 per cent indicated that they had no religion, and the remaining 13 per cent did not specify any.
- Most identified as Christian (58%), and most Christians were either Catholics or Anglicans.
- The largest non-Christian religious affiliation was Islam.
- Young Australians aged 15–24 years were less likely than any other age group to say religion was important in their lives, although the estimates of its importance varied widely according to denomination.

11 Disability, physical and mental health

Youth is a period in life of relative good health and most young people are likely to be disability free. Nevertheless, a number of young people experience disability. Disability may be a result of a physical, psychological or cognitive impairment and therefore includes young people who are restricted or impaired by physical and/or mental health problems.

Having a disability can affect young people's well-being. Emerson et al., (2008) found that young adults with a self-reported long-term health condition, disability or impairment had significant lower well-being than their peers on 31 of 38 well-being indicators. Such young people were more than twice as likely as their peers to be dissatisfied with their friendships; have poorer general health; have less vitality; use tobacco; be unemployed; be dissatisfied with their employment opportunities and job prospects; live in areas in which they were concerned about their safety; report themselves to be 'poor' or 'very poor'; be dissatisfied with their life overall; and have poorer mental health (see also Smart and Sanson, 2005).

The associations between disability and many other issues (family, education, work, social participation and risky behaviour) are also evident throughout the report. And disability, especially mental health related, was identified among key stakeholders as a particularly important issue for young people.

Understanding the full prevalence of disability – physical, psychological or cognitive – among young people 12-24 years is difficult because of the limited research on this cohort and the underreporting of mental health disorders in general disability surveys. By examining a range of data sources, including young people's physical and mental health, however, it is possible to gain some understanding of disability among young people.

11.1 Physical health⁴⁹

Most Australian young people 15–24 years regard their general health as being good to excellent (93%). This figure is very similar for Indigenous young people 15–24 years (91%) (ABS, 2005). However, a small proportion of young people experience physical health problems.

How many young people have long-term health conditions?

Just over one-tenth of all young people 15–24 years have a long term physical health condition. About 13 per cent of these young people 15–24 years who have a long term physical condition report having some form of learning difficulty, and 14 per cent state having a nervous or emotional condition that requires some form of treatment (ABS, 2005). Among 15–25-year-olds the most commonly reported conditions are hay fever and rhinitis (19%); short-sightedness (18%); asthma (12%); long-sightedness (9%); and, back pain/problems (9%) (ABS, 2006b).

Obesity and eating disorders

The number of overweight 18–24-year-olds has risen over the last ten years (Boese and Scutella, 2006). The National Health Survey (2004–05) shows that 22 per cent of males and 14 per cent of females aged 15–24 years were overweight, while 5 per cent of males and 6 per cent of females aged 15–24 years were obese. Although Indigenous young people are less likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be overweight, they are more likely to be obese, as shown in Table 11.1.

⁴⁹ Also refer to social issues for risky behaviour such as smoking and alcohol intake.

Table 11.1: Body mass index group by Indigenous status, 15–24-year-olds (per cent)

	Indigenous			Non-Indigenous		
	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Underweight	7	10	8	5	11	8
Normal range	40	41	41	57	56	57
Overweight	19	14	17	22	14	18
Obese	12	12	12	5	6	6
Not known	22	24	23	10	12	11

Source: ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey 2004–05

Boese and Scutella (2006) have also found that young people living in the most disadvantaged areas of Australia show significantly higher rates of obesity than those in the least disadvantaged areas. Obesity is an important issue for young people given that it can lead to other health problems such as diabetes, asthma and cardiovascular conditions (AIHW, 2008c) and psychosocial problems such as social isolation, discrimination and low self-esteem (ARACY, 2008b).

The focus groups with young people revealed an awareness that their diet may be poor:

I found that when I moved out of home, my diet was ridiculous. Packet food, take away, whatever was convenient most nights. It caught up with me, I put on weight and felt lethargic and my skin looked unhealthy. So I changed my diet and started going to the gym and now I feel a lot healthier. (Male, 18–21 years)⁵⁰

Conversely, a small proportion of young people are also underweight, an issue affecting more young females, than males (see Table 11.1). While eating disorders have a clear impact on physical health, they are also recognised as a mental health issue and are often coupled with other mental health problems such as depression (RANZCP, 2005). Body image and the pressure to look good was also a key issue for young women in the focus groups:

At my school, in every year level there was someone who was anorexic, that's pretty bad odds. (Female, 18–21 years)

You worry about your weight. It can become a mental thing. (Female, 22–24 years)

Eating disorders are only one facet of a range of mental health problems that can affect young people.

11.2 Mental Health

Mental health is an essential component of well-being. Good mental health means that young people are more likely to have fulfilling relationships, adapt to change and cope with diversity and the normal stresses of life (ARACY, 2008b). Mental health problems are defined as the absence of 'emotional and social well-being in which the individual can cope with the normal stresses of life and achieve his or her potential', and an inability to 'work productively and contribute to community life' (Australian Health Ministers, 2003). Mental illness or mental disorder is a diagnosable illness, like depression, anxiety or psychosis, which is determined by the symptoms, duration and impact experienced (Department of Health and Ageing, 2000).

⁵⁰ See also Section 10.4 on young people's participation in physical activity.

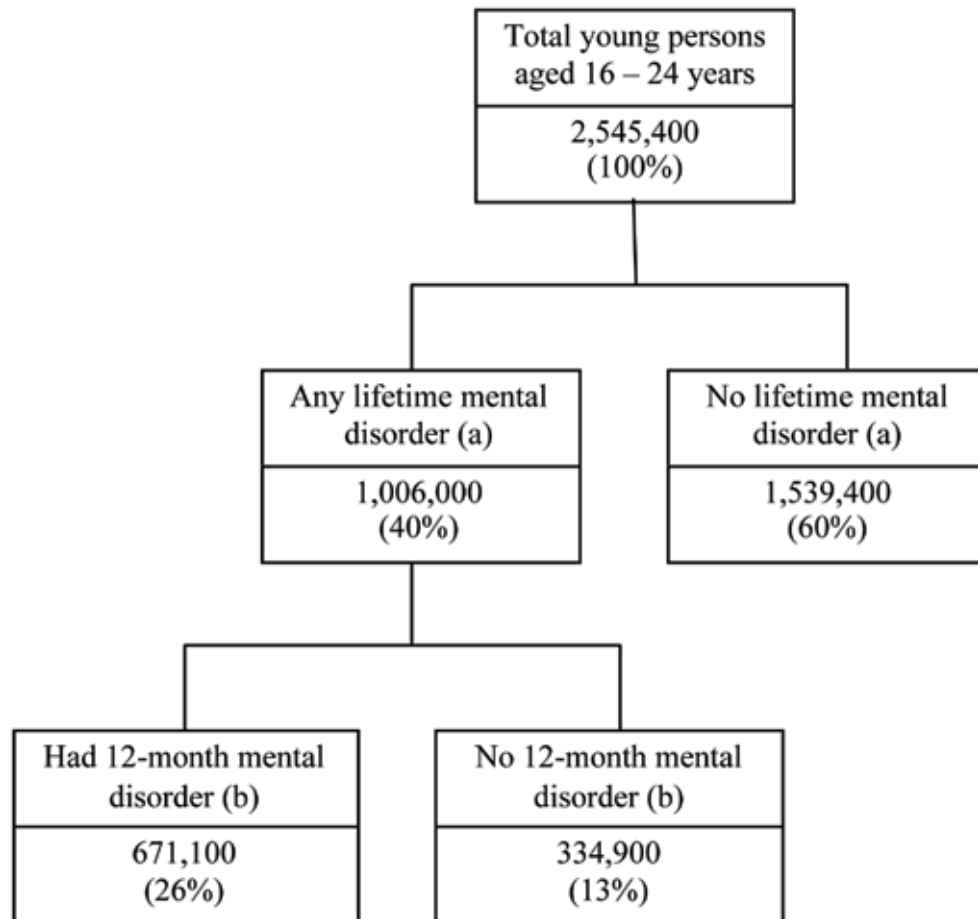
Mental illness is the leading cause of disability among young people (16–24 years). Furthermore, young people are the most likely group in the population to experience a mental illness and 75 per cent of adult mental health and substance use disorders begin in childhood or adolescence (Kessler et al., 2006 cited in McGorry et al., 2007a; ARACY, 2008b).

Mental health problems are often associated with other physical, social and emotional problems for young people (Sawyer et al., 2007). These may include substance abuse (Smart and Sanson, 2005), long-term physical health problems (ABS, 2006b), exclusion from education and/or employment, unstable housing, and limited or no social supports (ABS, 2006d; Bassett et al., 2003; Folsom and Jeste, 2002).

How many young people have a mental health problem?

The ABS 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found more than one in four young people aged 16–24 years (26%) have a mental disorder, including substance use disorders (Figure 11.1). This compared to approximately one in five (20%) in the general population. Overall, 40 per cent of young people 16–24 years have experienced a mental disorder at some point in their lives.

Figure 11.1: Prevalence of mental disorders among young people 16–24 years in Australia



(a) Persons who met criteria for diagnosis of a lifetime mental disorder (with hierarchy)
 (b) Persons who met criteria for diagnosis of a lifetime mental disorder (with hierarchy) and had symptoms in the 12 months prior to interview

Source: ABS Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2007

The three classes of high prevalence or common mental disorders are anxiety disorders, affective (mood) disorders, and substance use disorders. Anxiety disorders include generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, social phobia and post-traumatic stress disorder. Affective disorders are depression, dysthymia and bipolar affective disorder, which affect a person's mood or emotions. Finally, substance use disorders are characterised by an alcohol and/or harmful drug use and dependence. Table 11.2 reports the proportion of young men and women aged 16–24 years who have mental disorders in each of these categories.

Table 11.2: Proportion of young people aged 16–24 years experiencing each class of mental disorder by sex

	Male 16–24	Female 16–24
None	77%	70%
Substance use disorder	11%	5%
Anxiety disorder	4%	14%
Anxiety and affective disorders	3%	2%
Affective disorder	2%	2%
Anxiety and substance disorders	1%	4%
Anxiety, affective and substance use disorders	1%	2%
Affective and substance disorders	0%	1%

Source: ABS 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing

As Table 11.2 shows, young men were most likely to have a substance use disorder (11% compared to 5% of females). Young women were most likely to experience an anxiety disorder. Fourteen per cent of all young women had an anxiety disorder compared to only 4 per cent of men. A further 4 per cent of young women with a mental disorder have an anxiety disorder combined with a substance disorder compared with 1 per cent of young men. It is not uncommon for people to have more than one mental disorder. In fact, while 12 per cent of all young people have one disorder, 15 per cent of all young people experience two or more disorders (7% have two and 8% three).

Young people can also experience psychosis (an inability to distinguish reality and confused thinking, delusions and hallucinations) and schizoaffective disorders (a mixture of a mood disorder and psychosis, like schizophrenia), but to a much lesser extent. For example, 3 per cent of people experience psychosis at some time in their lives. A number of the low prevalence mental disorders have their onset in early adulthood. These include psychosis and schizophrenia.⁵¹

Psychological distress

As noted above, mental disorders are clinically diagnosed, but it is important to recognise that people can, to varying degrees, experience poor mental health or psychological distress regardless of whether they have been diagnosed with a specific mental disorder or not. For example, people may feel nervous, or hopeless, or restless at some point in the recent past.⁵²

⁵¹ <http://www.sane.org/information/factsheets/psychosis.html>. Note, these figures are not reflected in the table above because of the small sample size in the health survey when young people are extracted.

⁵² The 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing used the World Health Organization's (WHO) Composite International Diagnostic Interview (CIDI) for the diagnostic component of the survey. The survey provides diagnoses for selected mental disorders according to both the International Classification of Diseases, Fourth Edition (ICD-10) and Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 10th Revision (DSM-IV) classifications.

Kessler-10 (K-10) scores (which measure psychological distress) collected as part of the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, show that 56 per cent of 16–24-year-olds with a 12-month mental disorder experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress (Table 11.3). Comparatively, 29 per cent of young people who do not have a current mental disorder, but have experienced a mental disorder at some time in their lives and 24 per cent of young people who have never experienced a mental disorder are experiencing moderate to severe psychological distress.

While young people with a current mental disorder are potentially most at risk, the other rates of distress are concerning because they show that a sizable proportion of young people who do not have a current mental disorder experience poor mental health. Across all young people 16–24 years, one in three are experiencing medium to high psychological distress (whether they have a mental disorder or not).

Table 11.3: Levels of psychological distress (Kessler-10 score) for young people aged 16–24 years by mental disorder prevalence

Psychological distress levels ¹	12-month mental disorder (%)	No 12-month mental disorder (%)	No lifetime mental disorder (%)	Total 16–24 years (%)
Low or no psychological distress	44	71	76	67
Medium psychological distress	47	28	23	30
High psychological distress	9	1	1	3

¹ Based on the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression (CRUFAD) sK10 scale.

Source: ABS 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

It is also worth noting that young people 16–24 years with no history of mental disorder are more likely to experience higher levels of psychological distress than adults 25 years and over who also have no history of mental disorder. For example, 23 per cent of young people 16–24 years experienced medium levels of psychological distress compared with only 14 per cent of adults 25 years or older (Table 11.3).

Psychological distress by activity

Table 11.4 reports the proportion of young people aged 15–24 years with varying levels of psychological distress by the main activity they undertake (work, education, neither or both) using HILDA data (2007).⁵³ There is a very clear difference between the psychological distress levels of young people who are not in paid work or education compared to young people in paid work and/or education. Specifically, 53–57 per cent of young people in paid work and/or education report low or no psychological distress. This compares with 36 per cent of young people not in paid work or education. At the other extreme, 13 per cent of young people out of work and education report high levels of psychological distress, compared to 5–7 per cent of young people in paid work and/or education. The fact that almost two in three young people who do not work or study are experiencing medium to high psychological distress is alarming.

⁵³ The proportion of young people recording medium or high levels of psychological distress are higher than those reported above from the ABS Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing 2007.

Table 11.4: Levels of psychological distress (Kessler-10 score) for young people 15–24 years by main activity status

Psychological distress levels ¹	Paid work only	Education only	Paid work and education	No paid work or education
Low or no psychological distress	57%	55%	53%	36%
Medium psychological distress	36%	40%	41%	50%
High psychological distress	7%	5%	5%	13%

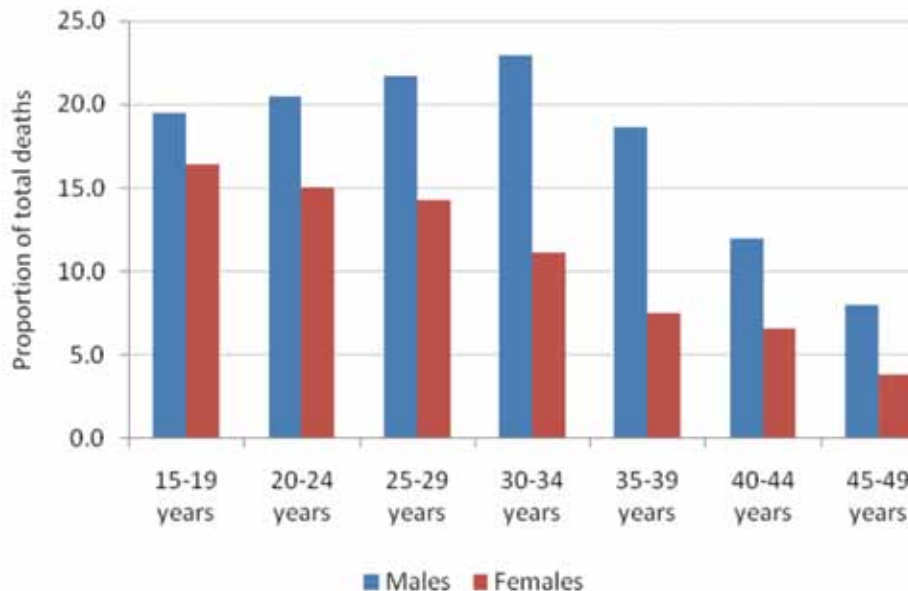
¹ Based on the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression (CRuFAD) sK10 scale.

Source: HILDA 2007

Suicide

Suicide is a rare but devastating event, particularly for young people and their families and friends. About 8.3 in every 100,000 young people 15–24 years commit suicide. This rate has decreased from 17.1 per 100,000 since 1998 (ABS, 2009a).

For the broader population, suicide is ranked as the 15th leading cause of death. However, for young people suicide is the leading cause of death. Figure 11.2 shows the proportion of all deaths that are a result of suicide for men and women 15–49 years by age group. It shows that suicide accounted for 20 per cent of all male 15–24-year-old deaths and approximately 15 per cent of female 15–24-year-old deaths in 2007 (ABS, 2009a).

Figure 11.2: Proportion of all deaths that are a result of suicide for men and women 15–49 years, Australia, 2007 (five year age bands)

Source: ABS, 2009a

Young men are more likely to suicide between the ages of 20–24 years than they are between 15 and 19 years. Comparatively, young females are more likely to suicide as teenagers than young adults (Figure 11.2).

A suicide is the final point in what can often be a long and painful time for a young person (indeed all people) with perhaps a lengthy period of time with suicidal thoughts, plans and even previous suicide attempts. The actual rate of suicide can be thought to represent the apex of a problem that has a much broader reach in terms of the numbers of young people affected. Table 11.5 reports the proportion of young men and women 16–24 years who have ever had suicidal thoughts, made suicide plans or ever attempted suicide.

Table 11.5: Proportion of young men and women 16–24 years who have ever had suicidal thoughts, made suicide plans or attempted suicide in Australia

	Men 16–24 years (%)	Women 16–24 years (%)
Suicidal thoughts	8	14
Planned suicide	2	6
Attempted suicide	1	6

Source: ABS 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing

Suicidal thoughts are disturbingly prevalent among young people especially young women. These results are striking considering that many more young men actually commit suicide. Therefore, though fewer young men think about it, plan it or attempt it, young men are more likely to complete the act. This disparity can be explained by the different suicide methods used by men and women (ABS, 2009a).

Young women are more likely to attempt suicide using a drug overdose, which depending on the type and quantity of drugs taken can take a longer amount of time to cause a death thereby increasing the likelihood that the suicide attempt will be unsuccessful. Men on the other hand, are considerably more likely to hang themselves, or use a firearm, both of which lead to death quickly. Although this applies to all men and women who commit suicide, there is no reason to suspect that these patterns would not apply to young men and women in particular. In sum, young men are more likely to choose more lethal means for suicide.

Help-seeking behaviour

Despite the prevalence of mental health problems among young people, Sawyer et al., (2007) found that only 20 per cent of 13–17-year-olds who identified as having a mental health problem had attended a professional service for mental health support in the six months prior to their study. Of the young people who accessed help, school counselling was the most frequently attended service. Sawyer et al., (2007) suggest that mental health interventions need to consider low rates of health service usage amongst young people with mental health problems, as well as the presence of co-morbidity.

Common barriers to help seeking for young people may include, cost, distance to travel, stigma, concerns around treatment and diagnosis, confidentiality and self-perceptions (Jorm et al., 2008). However, Jorm et al., found that the main barriers to help seeking for young people related to personal/social factors, such as embarrassment or concern about what others think, rather than structural issues. The focus groups with young people revealed similar issues, as well as concerns about how to help friends with mental health problems:

I think it's an easy thing to hide in some ways. It's easy to put a smile on. (Male, 18–21 years)

I'd like to think I'd be supportive enough if someone said they were depressed. Probably the hardest thing is spitting it out, admitting that you are suffering from an illness. (Male, 18–21 years).

There's one person I know who sees a psychologist regularly and he's borderline schizophrenic but, apart from that, I don't know anyone who would willingly go see a mental health professional. (Male, 18–21)

The young people in the focus groups also mentioned the cost of health services as a barrier to help seeking for both physical and mental health problems. Jorm et al., (2008) also suggest that a barrier to optimal help-seeking may be the contradictory views of young people, their parent and mental health clinicians' (including GPs, psychiatrists, psychologists and mental health nurses) about appropriate treatment, particularly around the use of anti-depressants, cognitive behaviour therapy and informal support.

Francis et al., (2006) found a range of barriers to help-seeking for young people in rural areas. These included a lack of specialist local services, a need to travel to gain appropriate access, exclusionary social practices and fear of social stigma, a lack of anonymity in rural towns and the perception that seeking help is a sign of weakness. Young people expressed a preference for informal, rather than professional, support, particularly from friends, but also family, although they were also able to identify a range of allied health professionals that could support them through mental health problems. These findings are supported by the focus groups with young people in rural areas:

You couldn't really go anywhere. There's nothing around here. You'd have to tell their family or someone. (Female, 15–17 years, rural)

Given one in four young people experience a mental disorder and one in three experience medium to high levels of psychological distress, many young people will be affected by mental health problems, even if they do not suffer from problems themselves. This was confirmed by the focus group participants:

I know a couple of girls in our class who have cut themselves ... It was depression. (Female, 15–17 years, Warren)

I had a friend who committed suicide last year because of depression. No one really knew, she just left a letter ... she was like the happiest person ever, but she wrote a letter about how unhappy she was. (Female, 22–24 years, Melbourne)

These reflections, coupled with the statistics and poor help-seeking behaviour shows the need for sound educational campaigns around mental health problems and help-seeking, including how young people might assist their peers. Young people's common reliance on family and friends for support and advice suggest that campaigns to increase help-seeking should, in part, focus on getting family members and friends to encourage young people to seek professional support. The policy response also requires accessible youth specific mental health services throughout Australia. The National Youth Health Foundation (headspace), for example, has demonstrated that when mental health services are accessible and available, young people are likely to seek professional mental health support on the recommendation or referral of their family members and/or friends (Muir et al., 2009).

How many young people have different types of disability and how severe are the restrictions?

It is difficult to determine the total number of young people with a disability. As noted above, a number of young people experience physical and mental health problems. These conditions may be disabling; that is they may cause a level of impairment or restriction on young people's lives. The 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) and the General Social Survey (2006) both report the proportion of young people with a disability. However, given the prevalence of mental and physical health problems, these rates are likely to be underreported.

Data from the SDAC found 8 per cent of young people aged 15–24 years had a reported disability. This rate was much the same for males (8.9%) and females (9.0%). Only 2.2 per cent of young people in this age group had a profound or severe core-activity limitation, compared to 6.3 per cent in the total Australian population. Of those young people with a disability, around one in five (21%) had schooling or employment restrictions due their disability and approximately a quarter (25%) had a schooling or employment restriction.

Results from the SDAC show that, in 2003, almost all young people with a disability aged 15–24 years (98%) lived in private dwellings. Of these young people, the majority (84%) lived with others and only 15 per cent lived alone. Less than 1 per cent of young people with a disability in this age group (0.7%) lived in supported accommodation and a further 1 per cent lived in other non-private dwellings.

According to self-reported data in the 2006 General Social Survey, the numbers of young people with a disability are slightly higher. Just over one tenth (11%) of young people 18–24 years reported having a disability or long term health condition that imposes restriction on their daily lives (Table 11.6).⁵⁴

Similar proportions reported having a disability that imposes profound or severe restriction (2.2%). A further 2.2 per cent reported experiencing mild/moderate activity restrictions. Among young people aged 18–24 years for whom the disability leads to restrictions in their daily activities, the predominant disability is physical (70.7%). About one in five young people 18–24 years who reported having a disability in the General Social Survey have an intellectual disability and almost one in four a psychological disability.

Table 11.6: Disability by severity and type among young people

	18–24 years %
Severity	
Profound or severe activity restriction	2.2
Mild or moderate activity restriction	2.2
Has a schooling/employment restriction	6.6
No specific restriction	13.0
No disability or long-term health condition	76.0
Type (of those with restrictions)	
Sight, hearing, speech	17.4
Physical	70.7
Intellectual	21.2
Psychological	23.0
Unspecified	32.5

Source: General Social Survey 2006

Notes: Population weights applies; Respondents could indicate multiple types of disability and it is not possible to know what is the main disabling factor

Analysis of the 2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers similarly shows that the main disabling conditions for young people aged 15–24 years are intellectual and psychiatric (AIHW, 2007). The most prevalent main physically disabling condition was musculoskeletal disorders (13.5%).

⁵⁴ Given the high rates of young people with mental disorders and mental health problems (see Section 11.2), these disability rates are likely to be under-reported.

The proportion of young people with a condition related to sight, hearing or speech is high compared with the proportion of young people who regard this as the main disabling factor (8.6%) (figure adapted from Table 2.4 AIHW 2007). This suggests that for many young people with a condition related to sight, hearing or speech, it is not the main factor in their disablement.

11.3 Conclusion

The majority of young people are disability free and generally in good physical and mental health. The total number of young people with a disability is not clear. National surveys report that approximately one in ten young people have a disability. However, given the numbers of young people with a mental disorder, physical health problem and/or cognitive disability, the rate is likely to be much higher.⁵⁵

With one in four experiencing a mental disorder, one in three young people under moderate to high psychological distress, and suicide being the leading cause of death for this age group, arguably, mental health is one of the most significant issues facing young people. Mental health problems, along with long-term physical health conditions and physical, cognitive and intellectual disability can affect young people's well-being and, without adequate supports, can impact on their ability to fully participate in society.

Key points: Disability and physical and mental health

- Most young people are disability free and have relatively good health, but a substantial minority experience disability, poor physical and/or poor mental health, which can significantly impact on their well-being.
- Just over one in ten young people report having a disability or long-term condition that restricts their daily lives, but this is likely to under represent the total number of young people with a disability.
- Musculoskeletal disorders are the main physical conditions affecting young people
- A key physical health issue for young people is obesity, particularly given its association with other health conditions. Almost a quarter of young people are either overweight or obese, and Indigenous young people are more likely to be obese than non-Indigenous youth.
- Mental health problems are the leading cause of disability among young people and they are often associated with social and emotional problems.
- One in four young people 16–24 years (26%) have a mental disorder in a given year.
- 75 per cent of adult mental and substance use disorders begin in childhood or adolescence.
- The most common mental health issues are anxiety disorders for young women and substance use disorders for young men.
- One in three of all young people experience moderate to high psychological distress.
- One in four young people who have never experienced a mental disorder are experiencing moderate to high psychological distress.
- Young people with high levels of psychological distress are much less likely to be in paid work or education than people with no, low or medium levels of distress.
- Suicide is leading cause of death among young people. About 8 in every 100,000 young people 15–24 years committed suicide in 2007. Young men are more likely to commit suicide than young women.
- Help-seeking behaviour among young people is limited, with reports that only one-fifth of teenagers with mental health problems seek professional support.
- Barriers to help-seeking are predominantly social (for example, fear, embarrassment, stigma), but also structural (such as cost, distance to travel), and may be more pronounced in rural and remote areas.

⁵⁵ Further research is needed to better understand disability among teenagers and young adults.

12 Social issues

Adolescence is a period of great change and is often characterised by rapid physical and psychological transition, experimentation and risk taking (ABS, 2008c). During the 'transition to adulthood', young people frequently experiment with new roles, activities and social networks and may be more likely to be influenced by their peer and popular culture. This transition can pose challenges for some but young people are generally successful in negotiating these challenges that adolescence presents (Cobb-Clark, Ryan and Sartbayeva, 2009: 1). This section explores some of the key social issues young people face including alcohol use, smoking, drug use, dangerous driving and sexual activity. It also reports on issues relating to safety, crime and child protection for young people.

12.1 Alcohol

Alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are often consumed in social settings. Several social and personal factors influence young people's consumption of these substances. These include, for example, parental, peer, school and religious influences and personal factors like self-esteem, rebelliousness, impulse-control, and trust (Capuzzi and Lecoq, 1983).

Young people in the focus groups reported commonly using alcohol, usually in the context of socialising. Some literature suggests that new communication technologies, such as mobile phones and social networking websites, have created new ways for young people to interact socially which has, in turn, changed the ways that they arrange their leisure time and impacts on their drinking decisions. New communications technologies can facilitate the organisation of 'big nights out' and provide alcohol producers with new avenues to market their products to young people (Roche et al., 2007: 9).

How many young people drink alcohol and how much do they drink?

Although it is illegal to sell alcohol to people under 18 years of age, many young people have access to alcohol before they turn 18. According to HILDA 2007 data, more than half of all 15–17-year-olds reported drinking alcohol. This is slightly higher for young men 15–17 years than young women. About 19 per cent of young men 15–17-year-olds reported drinking at least once a week, compared to about 10 per cent of young women in the same age group. A further 13 per cent of young men and 11 per cent of young women 15–17 years reported drinking 2 or 3 days per month (Table 12.1).

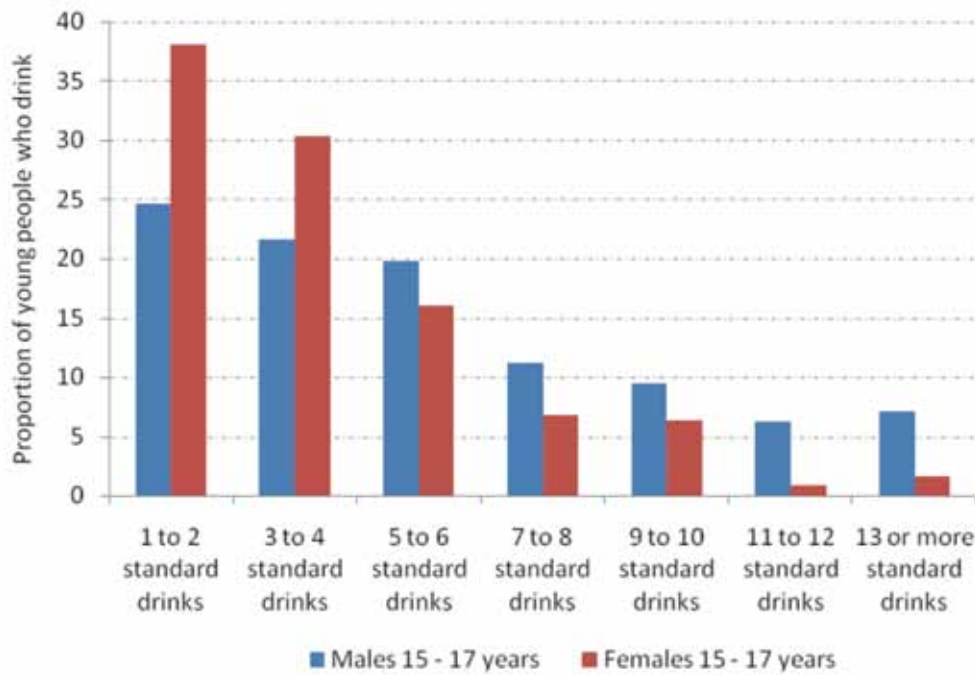
Table 12.1: Alcohol consumption of 15–17-year-olds

Alcohol consumption	Percentage of young men 15–17 years (%)	Percentage of young women 15–17 years (%)
Never	40.2	44.8
No longer drink	3.1	1.7
Drink alcohol everyday	1.3	0.1
Drink alcohol 5 or 6 days per week	0.2	0.6
Drink alcohol 3 or 4 days per week	1.6	0.5
Drink alcohol 1 or 2 days per week	16.1	8.4
Drink alcohol 2 or 3 days per month	13.1	11.3
Drink alcohol, but only rarely	24.5	32.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: HILDA 2007

Just over 45 percent of male 15-17-year-olds and 70 per cent of female 15-17-year-olds who drink alcohol reported drinking between 1 and 4 standard drinks on days when they usually have a drink (Figure 12.1). The remaining young people who drink, 55 per cent of males and 30 per cent of females 15–17 years, consume 5 or more standard drinks when they usually drink.

Figure 12.1: Number of standard alcoholic drinks usually consumed by young men and women 15–17-year-olds per drinking day



Source: HILDA 2007

Almost all 18–24-year-olds have drunk alcohol (Table 12.2). Males are more likely to drink alcohol, to drink more frequently and consume greater quantities of alcohol than women. About two-thirds of young men 18–24 years (64.9%) and about half of all young women 18–24 years (56.4%) report drinking at least once a week (Table 12.2). The proportion of young men 18–24 years who drank for 4–7 days in the previous week (16.8%) is approximately three times larger than the comparable proportion of young women 18–24 years (5.4%).

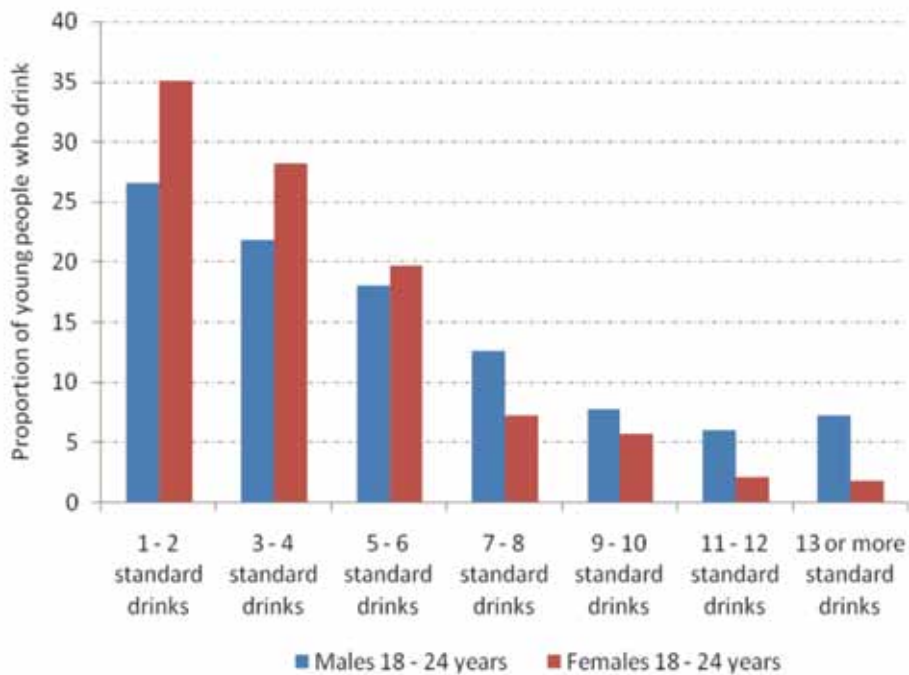
Table 12.2: Alcohol consumption of young men and women 18–24-year-olds

Alcohol consumption	Percentage of men 18–24 years (%)	Percentage of women 18–24 years (%)
Never	7.3	7.6
More than one year ago	3.3	4.8
In the past year	23.6	30.0
In the past week		
1 day	24.2	29.6
2 days	14.1	14.3
3 days	9.8	7.1
4–7 days	16.8	5.4
Unknown	0.8	1.1

Source: ABS 2005 National Health Survey

On average, young people 18–24 years drink very similar quantities to teenagers (see Figure 12.1 and 12.2). Forty-eight per cent of young men 18–24 years and 63 per cent of young women 18–24 years report drinking between 1 and 4 standard drinks on each usual drinking occasion. Around one in three young men 18–24 years and approximately one in five young women 18–24 years have at least 7 standard drinks.

Figure 12.2: Number of standard alcoholic drinks usually consumed by young men and women 18–24-year-olds per drinking day over 12 months



Source: 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing

Risk and alcohol use

The frequency and volume of alcohol consumed by young people of both age groups puts a large number of them at risk. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2009) recommends that young people under the age of 18 years should avoid drinking alcohol completely and that the safest option for children and teenagers aged 15–17 years is to delay the onset of drinking for as long as possible. However, for healthy men and women aged 18 years or over, it recommends drinking no more than two standard drinks⁵⁶ on any day to reduce the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol and no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from the occasion.

Based on the latest NHMRC recommendations, all 15–17 year olds who drink alcohol with some frequency (32% males and 21% females) are at risk; and 52 per cent of male 18–24-year-olds and 37 per cent of female 18–24-year-olds are drinking at levels that place them at increased risk of an alcohol-related injury. This consumption of alcohol by young people is an increasing concern due to negative social outcomes associated with ‘high risk’ or ‘binge’ drinking (Toumbourou et al., 2005; Lubman, Hides et al., 2007).⁵⁷ In 2005–06, for example, male and female teenagers aged 15–19 years had the highest hospitalisation rates for acute intoxication from alcohol among all age groups (124 and 126 per 100,000). Men and women aged 20–24 years had the next highest rates (89 and 74 per 100,000; AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database).

Young people themselves report a range of problems associated with their own alcohol consumption. More than one in four young men (18–24 years) and more than one in seven young women (18–24 years) reported that their alcohol use had jeopardised their safety. Almost one in six young women and one in eight young men reported that alcohol had interfered with their work and personal relationships. And almost one in six young women and just over one in ten young men stated that their alcohol use had cause problems with family or friends (see Table 12.3). Thus alcohol is impacting on the day-to-day lives of some young people by affecting their safety, work and social relationships.

Table 12.3: Proportions of young men and women 18–24 years who report alcohol related problems associated with potential abuse

	Male 18–24 years %	Female 18–24 years %
Alcohol jeopardised safety	28	15
Alcohol interfered with work	13	16
Alcohol caused problems with family/friends	11	16
Alcohol led to problems with police	8	2

Source: ABS National 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing

Note: Population weights applied

⁵⁶ A standard drink contains 10g of alcohol – this is equal to one glass of full strength beer (285ml), two 285ml glasses of light beer, or five 285ml glasses of extra light beer. It is also equal to one small (100ml) glass of wine, one measure (30ml) of spirits or one 60ml glass of fortified wine such as sherry or port.

⁵⁷ Excessive alcohol consumption has been found to be associated with increased illness; and contribute to domestic violence; financial problems; child abuse; family breakdowns and affect the health of new born infants if mothers consume alcohol while pregnant (SCRGSP, 2007: 41).

Shanahan and Elliott (2009) found that while young focus group respondents were generally aware of the short term risks associated with high levels of alcohol consumption (such as increased likelihood of being involved in assault), there was less awareness of the long term health risks associated with binge drinking: 'Binge drinking, they go on about, but I don't really see it as an issue' (Female, 22–24 years). Generally young people did not believe alcohol placed them at risk compared to drug use:

For me I know that one pill [of ecstasy, for example] can kill you, so I'm like, "no way" [I won't take that]. But with alcohol you can kind of control it, how much you have and stuff. [With] alcohol, it's more like the danger you're going to get into when you're drunk, like people can take advantage of you. (Female, 15–17 years)⁵⁸

How old are young people when they first consume alcohol?

People's first contact with alcohol often occurs during adolescence. Although it is illegal to sell alcohol to people under 18 years of age, many young people have access to alcohol before they turn 18. In 2007, the average age at which young men reported first consuming alcohol was around 15 years. Women were likely to be older; on average young women reported that they first consumed alcohol at 17 years (ABS, 2008c). Young people were most commonly supplied their first drink of alcohol by a friend or acquaintance, followed by their parents (43% and 35% respectively; Roche et al., 2007: 31). Recent medical research has suggested the importance of limiting alcohol consumption in adolescence as earlier initiation of drinking has been found to be related to more frequent and higher quantity alcohol consumption in adolescence, and these patterns are in turn related to the development of alcohol-related harms in adolescence and adulthood (Spear, 2004; Crews et al., 2000; De Bellis et al., 2005; Brown & Tapert 2004; White & Swartzwelder 2004 cited in NHMRC, 2009).

As discussed above, the NHMRC National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC, 2009) recommends that young people under the age of 18 should avoid drinking alcohol completely and that the safest option for children and teenagers aged 15–17 is to delay the onset of drinking for as long as possible.⁵⁹

Which young people consume the most alcohol?

An analysis of the ABS National Survey of Health (2005) and Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug Survey (2005) revealed a number of patterns in the alcohol consumption of young people with different demographic characteristics. These include age, gender, country of birth and language spoken at home, income, living arrangements and Indigenous status.

Age and gender

As discussed above, gender and age can impact on the frequency and amount young people drink. Young women generally consume less alcohol than young men and young men are significantly more likely to drink four or more days per week. Approximately 1 in 5 males aged 18–24 (22%) have an alcohol abuse disorder compared to 16% of females in the same age group.⁶⁰ Males are also more likely to have a substance use disorder than females (ABS, 2008b). As also discussed above, young adults are also more likely to drink at risky levels than 15–17-year-olds.

Country of birth and language spoken at home

Young people born outside of Australia and those who do not speak English at home drink less alcohol than Australian-born young people.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Young people's drug use is discussed below in Section 12.3.

⁵⁹ The NHMRC (2009) guidelines do not advocate that young people drink or that adults provide them with alcohol, but that if drinking does occur it should be at a low-risk level and in a safe environment, supervised by adults. The guidelines state that drinking to intoxication is particularly risky in this age group and note that serving drinks to young people under the age of 18 years by parents, carers or other adults may be subject to legislation.

⁶⁰ Results based on authors' analysis of the ABS National 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing.

⁶¹ Results based on OLS regressions on the total consumption of alcohol (in mls) by young men 18–24 years (n=566) and young women 18–24 years (n=521) in a seven day period. Independent variables are main activity status (paid work only omitted); born in Australia and English spoken at home or not; personal income decile; lives in major city or not; and household type.

Income and living arrangements

Income and living arrangements can both influence alcohol consumption. Young men with higher incomes, for example, drink more than those in the bottom 40 per cent of the income distribution. However, there is no association between personal income and young women's consumption of alcohol.

Drinking levels are quite similar for young men living in different types of households, with the exception of young men who live in group households. These young men drink more than young men who live with their parents or with a partner. Similar findings hold for young women except young women who live alone who also drink more than young women in couple households.

Young men living in lone parent households, who live alone or who live in group households drink more than those men who are living either with their parents or with a partner. Similar findings hold for young women except that those in lone parent households do not drink more than young women in couple households.⁶²

Indigenous status

Mission Australia's 2008 survey of young people found Indigenous young people were more likely to report alcohol as a major concern than non-Indigenous respondents (31% and 20% respectively; Mission Australia, 2008: 24). The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report (2007) found that risky levels of alcohol consumption had increased between 1997 and 2007, particularly among young men (SCRGSP, 2007).

There are, however, gender differences. Young Indigenous men (aged 18–24 years) were more likely to consume alcohol at risky or high risk levels than were non-Indigenous men in the same age group (about one in five compared to one in seven). However, there was no significant difference found between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women (ABS, 2006c).

What do young people drink?

Young people's choice of alcohol differs by gender. Young men are more likely to drink beer than young women (50% and 17% respectively) and less likely to drink spirits (37% and 49%) or wine (11% and 32%; ABS 2005 National Health Survey, author's calculations).

Similar findings were reported from surveys of drinking patterns of 15–17-year-olds conducted between 2000 and 2004. In 2004, young male drinkers were more likely than young female drinkers to report that they had consumed beer on their last drinking occasion (55% compared to 13%). In 2004, more than three-quarters of young female drinkers reported having consumed spirits on their last drinking occasion (77%). There was a decrease in the proportion of male drinkers reporting that they had consumed beer in the period 2000–2004. During the same period, there was a corresponding increase in the proportion of both male and female drinkers reporting that they had consumed spirits (King, et al., 2005).

12.2 Smoking

How many young people smoke?

The prevalence of smoking decreased considerably over the period 1997–2007, except among Indigenous youth. Despite this decrease, a significant proportion of young Australians continue to smoke.

According to the ABS National Health Survey (2005), about 27 per cent of 18–24 year-old young people smoked on a daily basis. This compares to 50 per cent of Indigenous young people from the same age group.

⁶² It is not possible to differentiate between the two groups of young people living in lone parent households – young people who are themselves parents; and young people being raised by a lone parent – using the National Health Survey. Young women in lone parent households are significantly more likely to be the lone parent (ABS, 2007) and this may account for some of the difference between drinking patterns among young men and women in lone parent households.

Just over one in ten young people 15–17-years reported smoking cigarettes or other tobacco products. However, only 5 per cent of 15–17-year-olds smoke at least weekly (HILDA 2007). The rates are quite small given tobacco is the second most accessible drug (after alcohol), half of all young Australians aged 14 years or older (49.2%) was offered or had the opportunity to use tobacco over a year (Smart and Sanson 2005: xi), and since peer pressure is often highest during teenage years (SCRGSP, 2007) and the mean age at which Australians commenced smoking was 16 years in 2005.

Which young people are most likely to smoke?

Gender, country of birth, main activity, income and geographic location are all related to the numbers of young people who smoke. Young men are more likely to smoke than are young women (ABS National Health Survey, 2005).⁶³ Overseas-born young people were less likely to smoke than those who were born in Australia. Those who combine education and paid work are less likely to smoke and, conversely, those who are disengaged from paid work or education are more likely to smoke. Interestingly, young people with higher levels of personal income are more likely to smoke. This is perhaps unsurprising given the costs associated with smoking, but it is also worrying if it indicates that young people may be viewing smoking as a marker of status.

Young people living in regional, rural and remote areas are significantly more likely to smoke on a daily basis than those living in cities. Household type is also an important predictor of tobacco consumption: young people who live alone or in group households are significantly more likely to smoke than those who live with their parents or a partner (ABS National Health Survey, 2005).

Health and young smokers

There is a great deal of evidence which states that smoking is detrimental to physical health. This is reflected by survey data which shows that young people who smoke, like their older counterparts, are less likely to rate their health as 'very good' or 'excellent' than non-smokers (ABS National Survey of Health 2005, author's calculations). Some young people in the focus groups also commented on the negative impact of smoking on their fitness and sporting success (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009).

Association with other drugs

Young people who smoked tobacco were also more likely to consume illicit drugs and other harmful substances. For example, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (2004–05) showed that Indigenous young people in non-remote areas who smoked regularly were twice as likely as non-smokers to have recently used illicit substances (42% compared with 20%).

12.3 Illicit drug-use

How many young people have used illicit drugs?

The 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey (AIHW, 2007) found that 23 per cent of Australian young people aged 14–19 years had used illicit drugs in their lifetime.

Despite the relatively high incidence of drug use by young people, regular usage of these drugs is comparatively rare. About one in four young people 18–24 years have used illicit drugs more than five times in their lives. Only 1.6 per cent of young people 18–24 years state that they use cannabis every day

⁶³ Results based on logit regression on a sample of 1760 young people 18–24 years. Dependent variable indicates whether young person 18–24 is a daily smoker. Independent variables are main activity status (paid work only omitted); born in Australia or not, and English spoken at home or not; personal income deciles; lives in major city or not; and household type. Sample response weights are applied. Results with a P value below .05, at least, are regarded as statistically significant.

and, among the 23 per cent of young people 18–24 years who have tried cannabis, only 14.5 per cent have used it in the previous year. A similar pattern is apparent for use of stimulants. Of the 8.4 per cent of young people who reported having used stimulants in the previous 12 months, most (5.5%) had used them less than once per month.

Which drugs do young people most commonly use?

Cannabis and stimulants are the most commonly used illicit drugs by young people aged 18–24 years. Young people are more likely to try cannabis for the first time before they reach the age of 15 years (30%). In contrast, first use of stimulants most frequently occurs between the ages of 19 and 24 years (27%).⁶⁴

Analysis of young people 18–24 years who have used cannabis in the past twelve months shows that young women are less likely to have used cannabis than young men.⁶⁵ Young people 18–24 years with disabilities, who live in a major urban area, and/or who have not completed Year 12 are significantly more likely to have used cannabis in the previous twelve months. Contrarily, young people who live with their parents are significantly less likely to have used cannabis. Closer analysis of the use of stimulants over a period of twelve months reveals similar findings (2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey).⁶⁶

Focus group respondents stressed the importance of context and maintained that some drugs were less dangerous than other substances. Typically, young people believed that cannabis was innocuous compared to other drugs:

I have friends who smoke pot, but I don't see that is as bad as taking pills or sniffing coke.
(Male, 18–21 years)

As with alcohol, it is possible to make a distinction between illicit drug-use and illicit drug-abuse. Some young people can develop particular patterns of usage that should be referred to as abuse rather than use. About 5 per cent of young people 18–24 years are considered to have a cannabis use disorder (abuse/harmful use and dependence), and about 4 per cent of young people 18–24 years are considered to have a stimulant abuse disorder. Young people who live with their parents are significantly less likely to have a substance abuse disorder for either cannabis or stimulants. In contrast, young people with disability are significantly more likely to have a substance abuse disorder.

Are drugs a concern for young people?

The proportion of Australians who approve the regular use of illicit drugs is generally low. However, more than 1 in 5 either 'approved' or 'neither approved nor disapproved' (6.6% and 16.6% respectively) the regular use of cannabis by adults. However, drugs *were* an issue of concern for many young Australians and between one-fifth and a quarter of young people surveyed by Mission Australia in 2007 and 2008 identified drugs as a major concern, with drugs listed as the top issue of concern for 11–14-year-olds. Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to be very concerned about drugs (29.3% and 23.5% respectively), supporting claims by commentators for the need for enhanced education programs and strategies that take account clients' age and gender (Mission Australia, 2008).

⁶⁴ Age of initiation was calculated across the population of young people in age cohorts.

⁶⁵ Results based on logit regression on a sample of 1007 young people 18–24 years. Dependent variable indicated whether young person 18–24 years used marijuana in the previous 12 months. Independent variables are sex, index of disadvantage, living with parent or not, with disability or not, completed Year 12 or not, born in Australia and speaks English or not, living in a major urban area or not. Sample response weights are applied. Results with a P value below .05, at least, are regarded as statistically significant.

⁶⁶ Results based on logit regression on a sample of 1007 young people 18–24 years. Dependent variable indicated whether young person 18–24 years used stimulants in the previous 12 months. See above note for further details of the analysis. Young people living with their parents are significantly less likely to have used stimulants in the recent past, but young people who have not completed Year 12 and young people with disability are significantly more likely to have used stimulants in the previous twelve months. There is no significant difference between young men and women in the usage stimulants, and no significant difference between young people living in major urban areas and those who are not.

The young people who participated in focus groups for this report (Shanahan and Elliott, 2009) also commonly raised their concerns about young people's drug use. However, some also reported that there was a misconception about how many young people use drugs and their availability at social events:

A lot of people, like especially my mum, she's always like when I come home from a party, "You didn't do any drugs did you?" ... Especially the older people seem to have the stereotype that every party's got drugs, but it's not true. (Male, 15–17 years, Sydney)

When they are used, however, drugs can place young people at high risk. In 2005–06, for example, there were 11,700 drug-related hospital separations for young people aged 15–24 years, nearly 60 per cent of which were for young women (AIHW National Hospital Morbidity Database). A small number of these cases lead to death. In the period 2004–2006, on average, 78 young people died from drug-induced causes each year (6% of all deaths among young people aged 15–24 years).

12.4 Dangerous Driving

Young Australians aged 20–24 years had the highest adjudication rate of all age groups for dangerous or negligent driving. The rate for men of this age was seven times higher than that for women (712 adjudications per 100,000 compared to 97 per 100,000; ABS, 2008c). Car accidents are the second leading cause of death for young people 15–24 years (ABS, 2009a).

Dangerous driving is often associated with the use of alcohol and illicit drugs. While young people are more likely to drive under the influence of these substances, the proportion of young people who reported driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol was relatively low and decreased from 13.4 per cent to 12.1 per cent between 2004 and 2007. Just under 3 per cent of Australians aged 14 years or older reported driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of illicit drugs in 2007 (Mission Australia, 2008: 45).

12.5 Sexual activity

There is little information available about sexual behaviour of Australian teenagers. The National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health is the primary source of this information and all data in this report is derived from this source unless otherwise stated.⁶⁷

How many young people are having sex?

The majority of surveyed Years 10 and 12 students (78%) had engaged in some form of sexual activity. Almost all young people reported having experienced deep kissing (79%) and respondents commonly reported having engaged in sexual touching (or being touched) (65%) and giving or receiving oral sex (44%). Intercourse was reported by approximately a quarter of students in Year 10 and just over half of those in Year 12. Between 2002 and 2008, the proportion of students reporting three or more sexual partners increased from 20 per cent to 30 per cent (Smith et al., 2009). Of concern is the approximately one-third of young people (32%) who had engaged in sexual intercourse and reported that they had had unwanted sex at some time in their lives. This rate increased between 2002 and 2008 and young women were significantly more likely than young men to have experienced unwanted sex (38% compared to 19%).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ This survey only provides information about young people who are engaged in formal schooling and does not include those who are in full-time employment or disengaged from education and work.

⁶⁸ Being drunk (17%) and pressure from a sexual partner (18%) were the most commonly cited reasons cited for having engaged in unwanted sex.

Safe sex

While the proportion of sexually active young people who had used condoms was relatively high (93%), only two-thirds of young men (61%) and less than half of young women (46%) reported that they had ‘always’ used condoms in the previous 12 months.⁶⁹ Year 10 students were more likely to use condoms than were Year 12 students, although this may be accounted for by higher usage rates of the oral contraceptive pill by young women in this group. Only 4.6 per cent of students reported having had sex that resulted in a pregnancy, while a further 4.4 per cent were uncertain as to whether or not this was the case (teenage pregnancy is further discussed below). Young Indigenous women aged 15–19 years were 4.5 times more likely to have babies than all Australian women in this age group (ARACY, 2008b: 105).

The level of knowledge about HIV transmission was generally high, although there were still gaps in young people’s knowledge about the disease.⁷⁰ Although knowledge about other sexually transmissible infections (STIs) improved over the period 1992 to 2008, knowledge about the most common infections remained low. Reported attitudes towards people with HIV and those affected by Hepatitis C were generally positive, as were attitudes towards gay and lesbian peers, although young women were more likely to have positive attitudes towards non-heterosexual peers than were young men.

Some stakeholders interviewed maintained that Australian policy had lost its focus on gender and that, in recent years, national and state-specific policies had begun to focus more on age and life-course issues. A number of stakeholders argued that there were still significant differences in behaviour and outcomes among male and female young people (and between men and women generally) and that this needed to be accounted for in future policy development.

Several recent studies have shown young women who experience unwanted sex are more likely to be diagnosed with an STI and more likely to become pregnant. Single-sex focus groups and interviews conducted with young men and women aged 14–24 years by 2007 found that young people would like more information about the social rather than biological aspect of safe and consensual sex in sexuality education programs (Powell, 2007). This was confirmed by discussions with public opinion makers interviewed for this report.

In addition, Powell (2007) found that the experiences of same sex attracted youth (SSAY) further highlighted the negative implications school-based sexuality education that focuses too narrowly on the biological aspects of sex. Inadequate information about non-heterosexual sexual practices leaves SSAY ill-informed and potentially compromises their sexual health. Indeed, SSAY have considerably poorer sexual health than heterosexual young people and are up to five times more likely to acquire an STI than heterosexual young people of secondary school age (Hillier, Turner & Mitchell, 2005, cited in Powell, 2007).

Teenage pregnancies

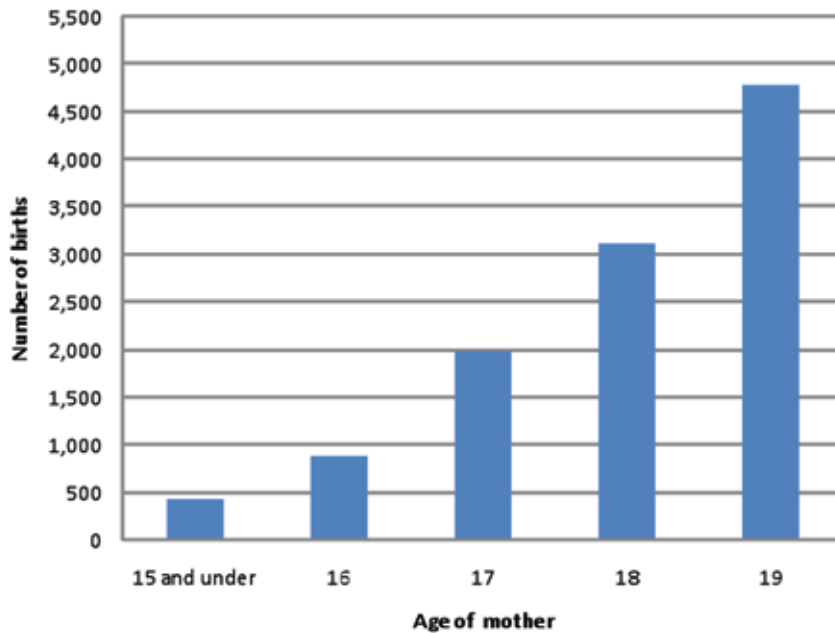
In 2007, there were 11,204 births to teenage Australian women (see Figure 12.3), indicating that 1 per cent of 12–19-year-olds are teenage mothers.⁷¹ Indigenous women are 4.5 times more likely to become teenage parents (ARACY, 2008). Senior and Chenhall (2008) hypothesise that a diverse range of factors including poverty, educational outcomes and unemployment play a role in this difference.

⁶⁹ This rate did not fluctuate between 1992 and 2008.

⁷⁰ For example, 12 per cent of students did not know that HIV can be transmitted during sex between men; 18% did not know that a pregnant HIV positive woman could pass on HIV to her baby; and 17 per cent did not know that someone who looks healthy could pass on an HIV infection.

⁷¹ Among the older age group, approximately 6 per cent of 20–24-year-olds are mothers.

Figure 12.3: Number of births to teenagers



Source: ABS Births, Australia 2007

Teenage pregnancy is associated with poor health and socio economic outcomes (AIHW, 2007; ARACY, 2008b; AIHW, 2009a). Teenage pregnancies have an increased risk of pre-term delivery, infant mortality and low birth weight (ARACY, 2008b) and teenage mothers often find it difficult to complete their education, have less financial resources than older parents and have children with poor health (AIHW, 2007).

Despite evidence that teenage mothers are often separated from the child's father (AIHW, 2007), data on living arrangements also shows that of those 12–24-year-olds with their own children, less than a third are lone parents (29%).

12.6 Safety, crime and child protection

Safety and victimisation

Being a victim of crime can be detrimental to a young person's health, well-being, sense of security, safety and feelings about the future (AIHW, 2008b). A major concern is that young people who are *victimised* are at high risk of victimising others in the future (Lauritsen et al., 1991). Being victimised can lead to diminished educational attainment and have a big impact on socio economic attainment in early adulthood (AIHW, 2007). Furthermore, young people are more likely to become victims of some violent crimes (including rape, other sexual offences and assaults) and are less likely than older victims to report a violent crime (DEECD, 2008; Johnson, 2005).

How many young people are victims of crime?

In a 12 month period, just over 3 per cent of young people aged 15–24 years were the victim of a violent crime and 3.8 per cent of 15–24-year-olds were the victim of a property crime (HILDA, 2007). Those under 15 years can also be victims of crime. Using ABS Recorded Crime data, the AIHW (2008c) showed that, in 2007, 900 young people under 15 years were robbery victims. Males were five times more likely to be a victim of crime than females. Among 15–19-year-olds, there were 3,900 victims of robbery in 2007, representing one-quarter of all robbery victims (AIHW, 2008c). Furthermore, there were 245,700 young people aged 15–24 years who were victims of assault in 2005 (AIHW, 2007).

Analysis of HILDA shows property crime among young people is not significantly linked to many socio-demographic factors.⁷² Violent crime, on the other hand, is quite strongly linked to a number of factors.⁷³ Young men are much more likely to be the perpetrators of violent crimes and while male victims often do not know the perpetrator, females usually do. Three quarters of men aged 18–24 years who were assaulted were attacked by a stranger, often in licensed premises or in the open. In contrast, over 80 per cent of women physically assaulted by a man knew their attacker, and were most likely to be attacked in their own home or that of someone else (ABS, 2008c).

HILDA data (2007) also shows that young people with disability aged 15–24 years are significantly more likely to be the victim of a violent crime. Young people living with their parents and still in school are much less likely to be the victim of a violent crime.

Indigenous young people are also more likely to be a victim of violence than non-Indigenous youth (ABS, 2006a) with one third of 18–24-year-olds Indigenous people reporting that they had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months (ABS, 2002). Key stakeholders also confirmed that young Indigenous people were more likely to be the victims of assault than other young people.

How does bullying impact on young people and how many young people are bullied?

A further aspect of safety for young people is bullying. Bullying is an important issue given that it can impact on school attendance, academic achievement, vocational and social achievement, and physical and mental health (AIHW, 2009a; Lodge, 2008). Rigby and Slee (1999) found that over 20 per cent of males and 15 per cent of females aged 8–18 years reported being bullied at least once a week. Bullying was an important theme that emerged in the Shanahan and Elliott (2009) focus groups. Respondents believed that young males were generally thought more likely to be the perpetrators and victims of violence than were young women.

How safe do young people feel and what factors are related to feelings of safety?

About one quarter of young people 18–24 years state that they feel unsafe or very unsafe when walking alone in their local area after dark. In addition, about 10 per cent of young people 18–24 years feel unsafe in their homes at night (General Social Survey, 2006). This was also reflected in the focus groups by Shanahan and Elliott (2009). A number of these young people felt unsafe walking around their neighbourhoods at night, especially in certain public areas:

I don't feel safe at train stations. I always hold my bag tighter, you're not so much afraid, but cautious and mostly at night. (Female, 18–21 years)

When I get off the train at night, I have my keys in my hand, bolt to the car and lock myself in. (Female, 18–21 years)

The general level of crime in a society, along with the extent to which young people are personally exposed to bullying, racism or other forms of discrimination, are central factors that determine how safe individuals feel. The extent to which people feel safe in society is important in terms of their quality of life and general well-being. Fabiansson (2007) found that perceptions of safety are strongly affected by the media, even when they live in a relatively safe location with strong community cohesion.

⁷² Results based on logit regression on 2026 young people 15–19 years. Dependent variable indicates if young person has been the victim of a property crime in the previous 12 months. Independent variables are age, gender, personal income, main activity status, living with parents, disability, not born in Australia and speaks English or not, and does not live in a major city.

⁷³ Methodology same as above (n=1930). Dependent variable indicates if young person 15–24 years (n=1930) has been the victim of a physically violent crime in the past 12 months.

The single largest demographic factor associated with feeling unsafe is gender. Women are significantly more likely to feel unsafe walking home at night in their local area and feel unsafe at home at night.⁷⁴ Mission Australia (2008) also found that women aged 11–24 years were more concerned about physical and sexual abuse than young men. Indeed, females are more likely to be the victim of sexual crimes like rape. This is likely to have a strong bearing on the extent to which young women feel safe.

The General Social Survey (2006) shows that young people aged 18–24 with disability are also more likely to feel unsafe at home at night.⁷⁵ This is understandable considering young people with disability are more likely to have been the victim of a violent crime, and it raises critical questions about the safety and security of young people with disability.

Who do young people trust and which young people are more trusting?

Trust is a factor that is also related to perceptions of safety. The General Social Survey (2006) shows that around 30 per cent of young people aged 18–24 years stated that ‘in general people cannot be trusted’ (this is a similar figure to all adults).

There is a very strong correlation between feeling unsafe either walking at night or at home and being distrustful of people in general.⁷⁶ Young women, however, are more trusting in general, but more likely to feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhood at night. Young people 18–24 years with disability are significantly more likely to be distrustful of people in general.

Importantly, the General Social Survey (2006) indicates that most people in general trust the police in their local area. However, distrust of the police is higher among young people, compared to the broader population. About 15 per cent of young people 18–24 years disagreed or strongly disagreed that the police could be trusted. For people aged 25–64 years this figure was 11 per cent while 9 per cent of people aged over 64 years distrusted the police. As with their distrust for people in general, young men are more likely to distrust the police. Young people 18–24 years with disability are also more likely to distrust the police.⁷⁷ In addition, feeling unsafe at home at night is positively correlated with being distrustful of the police. Young people who do not have a Year 12 certificate are significantly more likely to distrust the police. Recall that these young people are significantly more likely to use drugs and this may be connected to their feelings about the police. Young people with disabilities were also found to be significantly more likely to use illicit drugs. This suggests a complicated nexus for young people 18–24 years with disability of feelings of being unsafe, distrustful, being more likely to be the victim of violent crime and more likely to be using illicit drugs. It is likely that mental health problems are an important factor here.

74 Results are based on a logit regression on a sample of 1170 young people 18–24 years. Dependent variable indicates whether young person 18–24 years felt unsafe or very unsafe walking at night or at home at night. Independent variables are main activity status, living with parents or not, with disability or not, completed Year 12 or not, born overseas and speaks English or not, living in a major city or not. Sample response weights are applied. Results with a P value below .05, at least, are regarded as statistically significant.

75 See above for details of methodology which is identical except that the dependent variable indicates young people 18–24 years (n=1171) who feel unsafe at home during the night.

76 Results are based on a logit regression on a sample of 1065 young people 18–24 years. Dependent variable indicates whether young person 18–24 years who disagree or strongly disagree that people in general can be trusted. Independent variables are main activity status, living with parents or not, with disability or not, completed Year 12 or not, born overseas and speaks English or not, living in a major city or not, feels unsafe walking home at night, feels unsafe at home at night. Sample response weights are applied. Results with a P value below .05, at least, are regarded as statistically significant.

77 Results are based on a logit regression on a sample of 1065 young people 18–24 years. Dependent variable indicates whether young person 18–24 years who disagree or strongly disagree that the police can be trusted. See above note for other details of the methodology.

Crime

For most young people engaged in criminal activities the nature of the offence is often minor and the behaviour is short-lived (AIHW, 2008b; DEECD, 2008). Savelsberg and Martin-Giles (2008) show that illegal activities are strongly linked with youth marginalisation (see also, White and Wyn, 2004). They found that crime is often associated with ‘survival’ (e.g. stealing), particularly for those young people with the least access to financial support, and that crime is also used to secure acceptance (e.g. drug use) and to express resentment (e.g. vandalism). A lack of parental supervision and involvement, truancy, peer influences, unemployment and substance abuse are all high risk factors for involvement in crime (AIHW, 2007).

Smart and Sanson (2005) found that one-tenth of the young Australians were involved in illegal, criminal activities outside of substance use. They also found that between one-third and one-half of these young people were encountering ‘serious adjustment problems’ and that the rate of these reported problems reported may be conservative.

Juvenile justice

In 2006–07, a total of 12,656 young people were under juvenile justice supervision in Australia, of whom 10,675 were aged 10–17 years.⁷⁸ Five out of every 1,000 young people aged 10–17 years were under supervision at some time during the year. The number of young people in detention increased by 6 per cent each year from 2003–04 to 2006–07, while the average daily number of young people in detention increased by 12 per cent. This indicates that more young people are being detained and that they are in detention for longer (AIHW, 2008b).

Across Australia children and young people are deemed to have criminal responsibility from the age of 10, which is the youngest age a person may enter the criminal justice system (AIHW, 2008b). Juvenile justice supervision includes juvenile detention as well as community based supervision (such as probation, community service order or youth supervision order).

As shown in Table 12.4, the number of females under juvenile justice supervision is much lower than the number of males under juvenile justice supervision, with females accounting for 16.6 per cent of all 12–18+-year-olds under supervision. The number of Indigenous young offenders is also very high relative to their population distribution, although there are considerable differences between states and territories. For example, among young people under supervision, 86 per cent are Indigenous in the Northern Territory, 47 per cent in Queensland, compared to less than 20 per cent in Victoria, Tasmania and ACT (AIHW, 2008b).

Table 12.4: Total number of 12–18+ year-olds under juvenile justice supervision in Australia, 2006–07

	Total	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Indigenous %
Total	12656	7413	4556	36.0
Male	10554	6332	3660	34.7
Female	2095	1080	890	42.5

Source: Juvenile Justice in Australia, 2006–07 (AIHW, 2008b)

Note: most jurisdictions continue to supervise some young people who begin their sentence when they are under 18 until after they are 18.

⁷⁸ Although most of these young people were aged under 18 years, in most Australian jurisdictions, it is possible for young people to remain in juvenile detention after the age of 18 years if they are juveniles when they begin their sentence.

On an average day in 2006–07, a total of 941 young people aged 10–24 years were in juvenile detention centres, of whom only 8 per cent were female ($n = 76$) and 47 per cent were Indigenous ($n = 443$; AIHW, 2008b).

Adult prisons

Offenders over the age of 18 are generally sent to adult prisons rather than juvenile justice⁷⁹ (see Table 12.5). A total of 5,282 17–24-year-olds were in adult prisons in 2007. Similarly to juvenile justice, Indigenous young people are over-represented in the prison population. However, the proportion of women as a total of all prisoners aged 17–24 years is only 6.6 per cent.

Table 12.5: Total number of 17–24-year-olds in adult prisons in Australia, 2007

	Total	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Indigenous %
Total	5282	3433	1789	33.9
Male	4935	3263	1619	32.8
Female	349	349	170	48.7

Source: ABS Prisoners in Australia (2007)

Note: In Queensland, 'adult' refers to people aged 17 or over.

Young people in the criminal justice system are often characterised by high levels of socio economic stress, significant physical and mental health needs, and a history of abuse and neglect (AIHW, 2008b; Allerton and Champion, 2003; Bickel and Campbell, 2002; Prichard and Payne, 2005). Kenny et al., (2006) found that young people under juvenile justice supervision are at increased risk of injury, assault, suicide and self-harm.

Early intervention and rehabilitation

The AIHW (2008b) suggests that early intervention for young people at risk of crime and effective rehabilitation of those in the juvenile justice system can have significant benefits, with research indicating that persistent adult offenders are likely to have spent time in juvenile detention (Day et al., 2004). Clough et al., (2008) recommend diversion from court and prison for Indigenous Australian youth who commit offences, following the success of a diversion program in the Northern Territory.

Child Protection

Child abuse (commonly classified as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect; DEECD, 2008) has been linked to a wide range of immediate and long-term negative outcomes, with victims experiencing low self-esteem, fear, guilt and self-blame, depression, anxiety, nightmares and flashbacks (DEECD, 2008). This can continue into adulthood and also impact on poverty, educational attainment and homelessness (ARACY, 2008b). Many young people who experience abuse and neglect come from families who experience low-income, substance abuse, mental health problems, intellectual disability, domestic violence, poor parenting and isolation (DEECD, 2008; Eagar et al., 2005).

⁷⁹ There are many factors that impact on the decision whether to send someone to a juvenile justice centre or an adult prison, including the state/territory in which the offence was committed and the individual circumstances of the offender. Judges can decide that some as old as 24 years are not mature enough to be sent to adult prison and these young people may be sent to juvenile justice centres instead. If the crime is committed while the offender is aged under 18 years but they are aged 18 years or over when sentenced, they may be placed in a juvenile justice centre. Conversely, offenders under the age of 18 years can be placed in adult prisons under some circumstances. In addition, offenders aged 17 or over can be sent to adult prisons in Queensland.

It is often difficult to measure child abuse and neglect due to lack of common definitions and inconsistent reporting (ARACY, 2008b). However, AIHW (2009a) reports that the notifications of child abuse or neglect and subsequent investigations are increasing in Australia⁸⁰ and Shanahan and Elliott (2009) found that, while respondents were unlikely to talk about child abuse and domestic violence unprompted, respondents of both sexes displayed considerable concern about these issues when prompted.

Which young people are in the child protection system?

As shown in Table 12.6, in 2007–08 there were 10,538 children aged 10–17 years in substantiations of notifications. The table also shows that Indigenous children were clearly over-represented in the child protection system. Potential explanations of this over-representation may be the legacy of past policies to remove some Aboriginal children from their families; intergenerational effects of previous separations from family culture; poor socio economic status; and, perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing practices (HREOC, 1997; AIHW, 2009a).

In addition, substantiations are greater for younger children than older children. The highest number of substantiations is for the 5–9 year age group, followed by 10–14 years, with substantiations for 10–17-year-olds representing one third of all substantiations (AIHW, 2009a). In recent years there has been an increase in numbers of notifications and a decrease in substantiations, which may reflect increased awareness of, and willingness to report, child protection issues, alongside the success of family support services and alternative responses for less serious incidents (AIHW, 2009a).

Table 12.6: Children in substantiations of notifications received in Australia during 2007–08

	All children	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Indigenous %
10–14 years	8393	6710	1683	20.1
15–17 years	2145	1779	366	17.1
Total 10–17 years	10538	8489	2049	19.4

Source: Child protection Australia 2007–08 (AIHW 2009b)

Substantiations can (but do not always) lead to a child being placed on a care and protection order and/or in out-of-home care, although in some jurisdictions children can also be placed on a care and protection order or in out-of-home care for other reasons (AIHW, 2009a). This may happen, for example, where parents are incapable of providing adequate care for the child, or where alternative accommodation is needed during times of family conflict (AIHW, 2009a), for example if ‘time out’ is needed due to family conflict, if a child is a danger to themselves or where the parents are deceased, ill, incarcerated or unable to care for their child for another reason (AIHW, 2009a). Care and protection orders may include guardianship or custody orders, third party parental responsibility orders, supervisory orders, interim and temporary orders and administrative arrangements. At 30 June 2008, there were 15,123 children aged 10–17 years on care and protection orders (see Table 12.7). Out-of-home care provides alternative accommodation to children and young people who are unable to live with their parents, it may include foster care, placements with relatives or kin and residential care. At 30 June 2008, there were 14,185 children aged 10–17 years in out-of-home care (see Table 12.7).

⁸⁰ However, a decrease in substantiations was reported in 2007–08. See ‘Which young people are in the child protection system?’ for discussion and potential explanations of this phenomenon.

Table 12.7: Children on care and protection orders and in out-of-home care in Australia, at 30 June 2008

	10–14 years	15–17 years	10–17 years
Children on care and protection orders	10061	5062	15123
Children in out-of-home care	9737	4448	14185

Source: AIHW Child protection Australia 2007–08 (2009)

12.7 Conclusion

The teenage and early adult years are a period of substantial change and development for young people, but also of experimentation and risk taking. Consequently, young people negotiate a range of social issues. One of the most prevalent social issues among young people is alcohol use. The alcohol consumption levels of young people places a large number at risk of harm, which is reflected in the hospitalisation rates.

Their health may also be compromised by the proportion of young people who smoke and/or use illicit drugs. Only a very small proportion of young people 15–17 smoke regularly, but regular smoking increases alarmingly when young people reach early adulthood to more than one in four. A minority of young people have used illicit drugs, but the proportions are still one in five for those under 18 years and two in five for those 18–24 years.

Some young people also place themselves at risk by driving dangerously. Unsafe sexual activity continues among a proportion of young people, and, alarmingly, one in four young people reported having unwanted sex at some point in their lives. This suggests the need for education campaigns that are not only based on physical health, but also emotional health.

Only a small proportion of young people report being victims of crime. This proportion does not include young people who have experienced but do not report crimes. Sexual assault and domestic violence, for example, are often not reported. The proportion of young people who report being victims of crime are substantially outweighed by the number of young people who actually feel unsafe or are untrusting in general.

Key points: social issues

Alcohol

- In 2007, the average age at which young men reported first consuming alcohol was around 15 years.
- More than half of all 15–17-year-olds and almost all 18–24-year-olds have drunk alcohol.
- Approximately one in five 15–17-year-old males and one in ten 15–27-year-old females report drinking at least once a week.
- A large number of young people who drink consume 5 or more standard drinks on an average drinking occasion (55% males and 30% females 15–17 years; and 52% males and 37% females 18–24 years).
- Based on the latest 2009 NHMRC recommendations, a large number of young people are drinking at levels which place them at risk (32% of male 15–17 year olds; 21% of female 15–17 year olds; 52% of male 18–24-year-olds; 37% of female 18–24-year-olds).
- 18–24 years males are also twice as likely to have a substance use disorder as females in the same age group (22% compared to 16%).
- Young people born outside of Australia and those who do not speak English at home drink less alcohol than Australian-born young people.
- In 2005–06, male and female teenagers aged 15–19 years had the highest hospitalisation rates for acute intoxication from alcohol among all age groups.

Smoking

- Just over one in ten young people 15–17-years reported smoking cigarettes or other tobacco products.
- Five per cent of 15–17-year-olds smoke at least weekly.
- More than one in four (27%) 18–24 year-olds smoke on a daily basis. For Indigenous young people of the same age group, this rate is one in two.
- Young men are more likely to smoke than are young women and overseas-born young people were less likely to smoke than those who were born in Australia.

Illicit drug-use

- Approximately one in five 16-year-olds and two-fifths of 18–24-year-olds had used illicit drugs.
- Cannabis and stimulants are the most commonly used illicit drugs by young people aged 18–24 years.
- Young people are more likely to try cannabis for the first time before they reach the age of 15 years (30%). In contrast, first use of stimulants most frequently occurs between the ages of 19 and 24 years (27%).
- About 5% of young people 18–24 years are considered to have a cannabis abuse disorder; 4% are considered to have a stimulant abuse disorder.

Dangerous Driving

- 20–24-year-old Australians had the highest adjudication rate of all age groups for dangerous or negligent driving.
- Men aged 20–24-year-old were seven times more likely to be involved in adjudication for dangerous or negligent driving than women in the same age group.
- The proportion of young who reported driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol decreased from 13.4% to 12.1% between 2004 and 2007.
- Just under three per cent of Australians aged 14 years or older reported driving a motor vehicle while under the influence of illicit drugs in 2007.

Sexual activity

- One in four Year 10 students and just over half of all Year 12 students reported having engaged in sexual intercourse.
- Two-thirds of young people who were sexually active had used condoms.
- Approximately one in three young people who had engaged in sexual intercourse reported that they had had unwanted sex at some time in their lives.
- Fewer than one in ten students (6%) reported having had sex that resulted in a pregnancy.

General risk and protective factors

- Risk Factors
 - Living in families where one or both parent receives welfare.
- Protective Factors
 - Using a wide range of social supports (such as parents, family and friends).
 - Engaging in structured leisure activities.
 - Autonomy in deciding what leisure activities they take part in.

Safety, crime and childhood protection

- For young people, being a victim of crime can negatively impact on health, well-being, perceptions of safety, educational achievement and socio economic attainment.
- While few young people are the victims of crime, young people are more likely than others to be affected by particular crimes, such as violence.
- Men, young people with disability and Indigenous young people are all more likely to be the victims of violent crime than other young people.
- Regardless of crime levels, almost one quarter of young people feel unsafe walking home alone in their local area at night. Young women and young people with disability are most likely to feel unsafe.
- For most young people involved in criminal activity, the offences are minor and the behaviour is usually short-lived. For young people whose offences are more serious and persistent, crime is strongly associated with disadvantage in other areas of life.
- Around 12,000 young people are under juvenile justice supervision orders, of whom about 650 are in detention centres. Indigenous young people are over-represented in both the juvenile justice system and adult prison population.
- Child abuse and neglect is linked to a range of short and long-term negative outcomes including, health and well-being, educational achievement and poverty. Young people who experience abuse are often from marginalised families as well.
- Younger children and Indigenous young people are both over-represented in the child protection system.

13 Conclusion

This research presents a generally positive view of how young people in Australia are faring overall. Australian young people generally achieve high levels of educational attainment and performance. The majority have at least completed Year 12 and their reading, writing and numeracy results compete strongly with their international peers. Many young people are employed (especially in a part-time capacity) and they actively contribute to household domestic work and care. Australian young people also take part in voluntary and community-based activities, and some are civically engaged in a range of other areas. As such, young people are highly productive and make a substantial contribution to Australian society.

The 12–24 year period is not only characterised by educational, employment and personal achievements and increasing income, but also by increasing independence, new experiences, transitions and broad optimism. It is a time when young people balance competing demands of education, work, domesticity, friends and community participation. Most successfully negotiate the transition between work and education and, importantly, take time out to socialise and participate in leisure activities.

While young people still largely rely on family for practical and emotional support and spend large amounts of time with family members, young people become increasingly independent as they get older. Relationships with family members can also strengthen as young people move into young adulthood.

Similarly, friends are enormously important in young people's lives. Young people rely on friends for support and camaraderie, but they are also critical for social and emotional development. Youth is also a time when young people start to have intimate relationships, which become increasingly serious as young people move from the teenage years to young adulthood.

While this picture illustrates a broadly successful generation of young people, these years can also be enormously challenging, are often filled with some risk taking, and success across all life areas is not equally distributed. A number of young people, for example, experiment with substance use (alcohol, smoking and/or illicit drugs) and are more likely to drive dangerously and have unsafe sex than older adults. Of particular concern are:

- the 1 in 100 young people who are homeless;
- the 1 in 3 young people who have engaged in unwanted sex at some time and the 1 in 3 sexually active young people who do not use condoms;
- the number of young lone parent households experiencing poverty;
- the increase in the number of young people involved in cyber bullying;
- the almost 1 in 3 young people who are an unhealthy weight;
- the almost 1 in 3 15–17-year-old males, 1 in 5 15–17-year-old females, 1 in 2 18–24-year-old males, and more than 1 in 3 18–24-year-old females who drink alcohol at levels above 2009 NHMRC recommendations; and
- the 1 in 4 young people who have a mental disorder in a given year and 1 in 3 young people who experience moderate to high levels of psychological distress.

The foundation for young people's outcomes is almost always educational attainment. Young people who complete Year 12 or an equivalent certificate are more likely to be employed and, in turn, have higher personal incomes and are less likely to be living in a household experiencing poverty. Education, employment and income are therefore inextricably linked. It is important to recognise that they act both as demographic characteristics impacting on a range of outcomes and as outcomes in themselves.

Certain characteristics increase or decrease the likelihood that young people will achieve positive educational, employment and income outcomes: including Indigenous status, socio economic status, gender and disability (Table 13.1).

Young people from lower socio economic status backgrounds and Indigenous young people fare consistently worse in educational, employment and income outcomes than young people from higher socio economic status backgrounds and non-Indigenous young people. They are less likely to have completed Year 12, less likely to reach international reading and writing benchmarks, and less likely to be employed and to be engaged in full-time employment and more likely to have low personal incomes and to be in households experiencing poverty (Table 13.1).

There are also significant differences in outcomes for young people based on their geographic location, gender and disability status. Males are less likely than females to have completed Year 12 and to have reached internationally recognised reading and writing benchmarks. Young people living outside of major urban areas are less likely to have completed Year 12 and to have reached reading, writing and numeracy benchmarks. Similarly, young people with a disability are less likely to be employed than young people who do not have a disability (Table 13.1).

Table 13.1: Education, employment and income outcomes by young people’s demographic characteristics

	Male cf. female	Indigenous cf. non-Indigenous	Low SES cf. other SES	Lives in non-urban cf. major urban area	Not working or studying cf. working and/or studying	No disability cf. disability
Year 12 Certificate	O	O	O	O	O	..
Reading and writing benchmarks	O	O	O	O	..	..
Numeracy benchmarks	X	O	O	O	..	..
Employed	X	O	O	..	-	O
Employed fulltime	P	O	O	..	-	..
Higher personal income	P	O	-	..	O	..
No household poverty (at 50%)	..	O	-	..	O	..
Key: O- less likely (faring worse); P - more likely (faring better); X - no impact; .. - information not available from this research						

These consistent findings demonstrate that Indigenous young people, those from low socio economic backgrounds, young people with a disability and those who are neither working nor studying require additional support to complete education, attain employment and stay out of poverty. These characteristics are not necessarily mutually exclusive and often disadvantage is compounded by experiencing multiple factors.

Completing Year 12 is fundamental to not only future employment and income, but is also associated with a young person's social, community, substance use and health outcomes. As Table 13.2 summarises, young people who have not completed Year 12 are less likely to participate in civic activities or volunteer, and are less likely to trust the police and more likely to have used drugs on more than five occasions, compared to young people who have completed Year 12.

Other consistent patterns occur when social, community, substance use and health outcomes are examined by demographic characteristics. Again gender, Indigeneity, work/education status and disability can have an impact (Table 13.2).

Males are at greater risk than females of violence and substance use. They are less trusting than females, are more likely to have been a victim of crime, and more likely to smoke and to use and abuse alcohol and cannabis than their female counterparts. Similar risk factors are also more likely to be faced by Indigenous young people, compared to non-Indigenous young people.

While gender and Indigenous status can affect a range of outcomes, it appears that not being in work or education and/or having a disability places young people most at risk. Despite having more free time, young people who do not work or study spend less time with friends and are less likely to be involved in social and community activities than young people who are working and/or studying. These young people are also at increased risk of a mental disorder and less likely to exercise. This combined lack of productive, social and leisure activity indicates that young people within this group may be experiencing significant social exclusion.

Another group at high risk of social exclusion are young people with a disability. Not only are they more likely to be unemployed (as previously mentioned) than young people without a disability, they are also more likely to have a mental disorder; to be dependent on alcohol; to frequently use drugs and abuse cannabis and stimulants; to be a victim of crime and yet also to distrust the police, distrust people in general, feel unsafe, and spend less time with friends. On almost every economic and social measure, young people with a disability are more likely to be excluded and/or at greater risk. This may be correlated with the large number of young people with mental health problems, which are associated with substance use and social and vocational problems.

Considerable cross government departmental support will be required to improve the mental health, substance use and social, educational and employment outcomes of young people with a disability. Furthermore, disengaged and disadvantaged young people require support and protection to decrease the likelihood that they will be victims of crime and to build a level of trust that will enable them to seek assistance from the police. The time young people spend with their families was not found to be affected by whether a young person has a disability or not. Therefore families may provide an important intervention point. Indeed, this research has found that living with parent(s) is a protective factor. Young people who are living with parent(s) are less likely to use alcohol and illicit drugs and to abuse these substances.

Table 13.2: The likelihood of social, community, substance use and health outcomes by young people's demographic characteristics

	Male cf. female	Working and studying cf. not working and studying	Not working or not studying cf. working and/or studying	No Y12 certificate cf. Yr 12 certificate	Lives in non-urban area cf. major urban area	Lives with parents cf. not living with parents	Disability cf. no disability	Indigenous cf. non-Indigenous	Born overseas, speaks English at home cf. born in Australia	Born overseas, does not speak English at home cf. born in Australia
Social and community	Civic engagement activities	P	O	O	O	O	..	O	O	O
	Civic / Governance groups					O	..	P		
	Social / community groups	O	P	O	O	P	..	..	..	O
	Volunteering		P	O	O	P	..	..	..	O
	Internet access		P	O	..	O	..	O	..	O
	More time with friends		P	O	..	O	O	..	P	P
	More time with family		O	O	..	P	P	..	P	O
Trust and safety	Feels safe (overall)	P	P	O		P	..	..
	Feels safe at home at night	P	P	P		P	O	..		
	Trusts people in general	O					O	..	P	
	Trusts police	O					O	..		
	Has not been a victim of a violent crime	O	P		..	P	O	..		
	Does not smoke	O	P	O	..	O	P	O	P	P
	Less or no alcohol consumption	O*			..		P*	..	O males	P
Substance use	No alcohol dependency	O	..	..	..	O	O	..	P	P
	Never used drugs		..	..	..	P	O	..	P	P
	Has not used drugs >5 times		..	..	..	P	O	..	P	..
	Has not used cannabis	O	..	..	..	P	O*	..	P	..
	Has not used stimulants		..	..	..	P	O*	..	P	..
Health and wellbeing	Engages in exercise	P	P	O	..	P	..	..	..	O
	No mental disorder	P	P	O	..	P	O	..	..	..

Key: cf. - compared O- less likely (faring worse) P - more likely (faring better) .. - information not available from this research *- Does not abuse the drug

Young people at particular risk require additional governmental support to help place them on an equal footing to other young people. The fact that key demographic characteristics increase young people's risks across a range of domains indicates that a cross-governmental, coordinated response to support these young people makes sense at a policy and practical level.

Besides the social gains, investing in and improving all young people's outcomes will have workforce and community benefits, which are increasingly important as Australia's population ages. Furthermore, research has found that investing in young people is cost-effective. Cunha and Heckman (2006) found that if investment in early childhood is coupled with investment in adolescents then substantial gains can be made in educational outcomes (high school completion and tertiary education) and decreased crime. Given the close relationship between educational attainment, employment and other social, health and substance use outcomes, investing in Australia's young people has important social and economic implications, not just for young people themselves, but for the country as a whole.

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