

Can We Talk? Seven Year Youth Mental Health Report

By Faye Williamson

This is the fourth time Mission Australia has joined forces with the Black Dog Institute to produce the joint, Youth Mental Health Report.

This latest Youth Mental Health Report gives us a snapshot of the issues and challenges facing our young people over the last seven years (2012-2018). The data reveals important insights about the prevalence of psychological distress experienced by young people, where they go to for help and their main concerns.

With more than 75% of mental health issues developing before the age of 25, there's a critical window to intervene before mental illness takes hold with lifelong consequences.

Key Findings

Prevalence and patterns of psychological distress over time

- Close to one quarter (24.2%) of young people aged 15-19 years reported experiencing psychological distress (PD). There has been an increase in the proportion of young people with psychological distress over the past seven years (rising from 18.7% in 2012 to 24.2% in 2018).

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- The proportion of females with psychological distress has shown an increase of 7.5% over the past seven years - from 22.5% in 2012 to 30.0% in 2018.
- The proportion of males with psychological distress has shown a more modest increase of 2.9% over the same period, from 12.7% in 2012 to 15.6% in 2018.

- Between 2012 and 2018, the largest increases in the proportion of young people with psychological distress can be seen among both the youngest and the oldest age groups, with an increase of 6.0% among 15 year olds (17.1% in 2012 to 23.1% in 2018) and an increase of 8.8% among 18-19 year olds (18.2% in 2012 to 27.0% in 2018).
- Nearly one third (31.9%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experienced psychological distress, compared to 23.9% of non-Indigenous respondents. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with psychological distress rose by 3.3% from 28.6% in 2012 to 31.9% in 2018.

Youth Survey 2018 – Wellbeing results

Perception of control over life

- Twelve times the proportion of young people with psychological distress indicated feeling as though they had no control over their life (10.8% compared with 0.9% of respondents without psychological distress).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with psychological distress were almost three times as

likely as their non-Indigenous peers to report feeling as though they had no control over their life (27.0% compared with 9.4%).

Levels of self-esteem

- Almost ten times the proportion of young people with psychological distress reported low levels of self-esteem (30.6% compared with



3.8% of young people without psychological distress).

- Over three in ten (31.5%) females experiencing psychological distress reported low levels of self-esteem (compared with 23.8% of males).
- A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with psychological distress reported low levels self-esteem (43.4% compared with 29.5% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Issues of personal concern

- The top three issues of personal concern for young people with psychological distress were coping with stress, mental health and school or study problems (74.3%, 62.7% and 55.4%). Coping with stress was also the top concern for respondents without psychological distress, followed by school or study problems and body image (33.5%, 27.0% and 22.6%).
- Almost four times the proportion of young people with psychological distress reported concerns about suicide (35.6% compared with 9.4% of respondents without psychological distress).

- Over three times the proportion of young people with psychological distress reported concerns about bullying and emotional abuse (32.1% compared with 10.4% of respondents without psychological distress).
- Compared with males, double the proportion of females with psychological distress indicated concerns about body image (63.4% compared with 33.8%).
- A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents indicated concerns about suicide (40.2% compared with 35.6% of non-Indigenous respondents).

Youth Survey 2018 – Help-seeking results

Experience of serious or stressful problems

- Over five times the proportion of young people with psychological distress reported having issues that they did not seek help for, despite thinking they needed to (36.5% compared with 7.0% of young people without psychological distress).
- A greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with psychological distress reported having issues that they did not seek help for, despite thinking they needed to (41.2% compared with 36.2% of non-Indigenous respondents).
- Almost four times the proportion of young people with psychological distress had no one they felt they could turn to if they were in trouble or a crisis (20.9% compared with 5.6% of young people without psychological distress).

Where do young people go for help with important issues?

- Friend/s and parent/s or guardian/s were the two most commonly cited sources of help for all participants (75.9% and 54.8% of young people with



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psychological distress compared with 87.4% and 82.8% for young people without psychological distress).

- The third most commonly cited source of help for young people with psychological distress was the internet, while for young people without psychological distress, it was a relative/family friend.

Barriers to help-seeking

- Stigma and embarrassment, fear, and a lack of support were the three most commonly cited barriers that young people reported as preventing them from getting the help they need.
- A higher proportion of young people with psychological distress saw a lack of support as a barrier that prevents

them from getting the help they need (26.8% compared with 23.1% of young people without psychological distress).

- Compared with males, higher proportions of females saw stigma and embarrassment (39.4% compared with 33.2% of males), fear (31.3% compared with 19.7%) and a lack of support (28.6% compared with 24.1%) as barriers to seeking help.
- Stigma and embarrassment, a lack of support, and fear were also the three most commonly cited barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents saw as preventing them from getting the help they need. ■

Source: *Can we talk? Seven year youth mental health report – 2012-2018, Mission Australia*