

Girls' wellbeing: Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021

June 2022



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia





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Our vision

That all children and young people are heard, are healthy and safe, reach their potential and are welcomed as valued members of the community and in doing so we build a brighter future for the whole community.

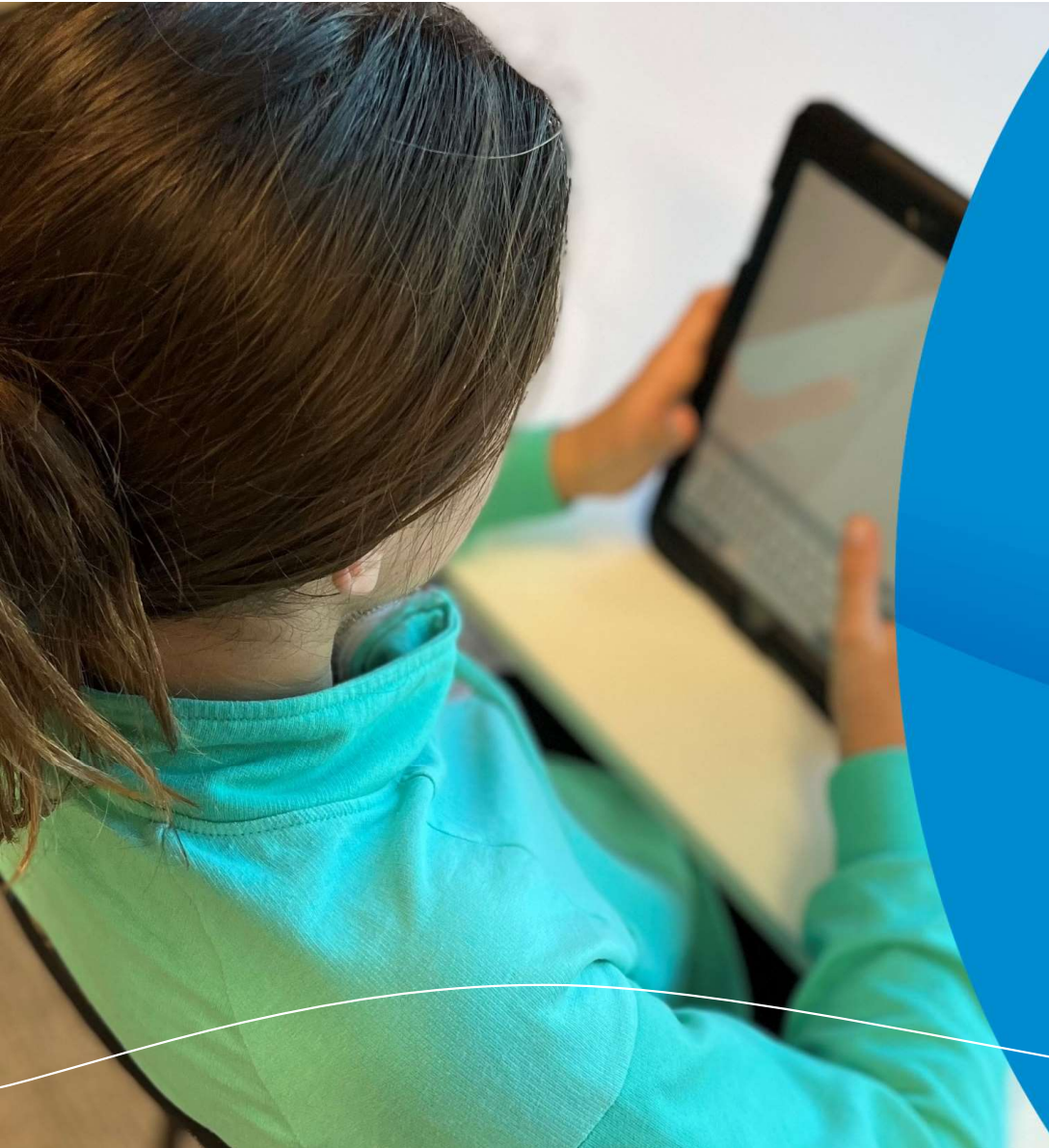


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Commissioner's role

- Promoting the rights, voices and contributions of children and young people
- Monitoring and advocacy to strengthen the wellbeing of all WA children and young people
- Prioritising the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and young people.





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Speaking Out Survey

- A unique evidence base of the wellbeing of children and young people in WA
- Questions on physical and mental health, education and participation, relationships and safety
- Random sample of schools across WA
- Support for the research provided by Department of Education, Catholic Education of WA, Independent Schools WA
- Independently administered by the Commissioner's office



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Speaking Out Survey (cont.)

Speaking Out Survey 2019

- Pilot survey conducted in 2019: 4,912 Year 4 to 12 students

Speaking Out Survey 2021

- 16,532 Year 4 to Year 12 students across all regions of WA (4,912 in 2019)
- 1,145 Aboriginal students (8.4% of main sample)
- Results are representative of Year 4 to 12 students in government, independent and Catholic schools in WA





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Qualitative data

- Open text questions were available for participants to complete, including:
 - seeking help for mental health worries,
 - what do adults need to know about safety
 - reasons for feeling unsafe,
 - views on local area and
 - feedback about the survey.
- 11,450 participants provided at least one response



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*I liked this survey because it made me
feel like us students have a say in
things and people care about our
opinion.*

(13-year-old)





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Main findings

- Children and young people in WA report **generally positive outcomes**
- **Mental health** is a critical issue for many children and young people
- **Female students** rate their wellbeing less favourably than male students
- Many children and young people **do not always feel safe** at home, at school or in their community





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Girls' wellbeing

- Across multiple measures female young people reported **lower wellbeing** than male young people in the 2019 and 2021 surveys
- Literature review: *Exploring the decline in the wellbeing for Australian girls*
- International evidence shows there has been a decline in adolescent emotional wellbeing in the past decade.
- At the same time, the gender gap is widening.





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Girls' wellbeing: Literature review

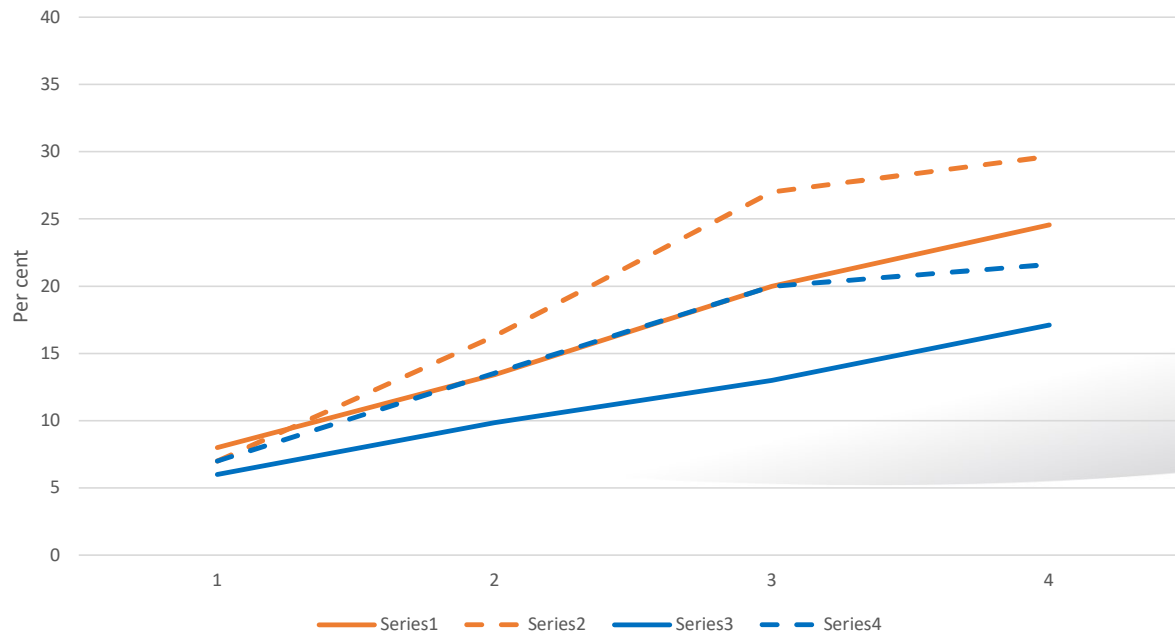
- Topics included:
 - Mental health
 - General health
 - Engagement and support in school
 - Relationships, connection to community and support
 - Equity in everyday life
 - Social media, identity and body image
 - Sexual health and respectful relationships
 - Feeling and being safe



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School belonging: PISA

Proportion of Australian students responding to negative belonging questions from PISA 2003 to 2018



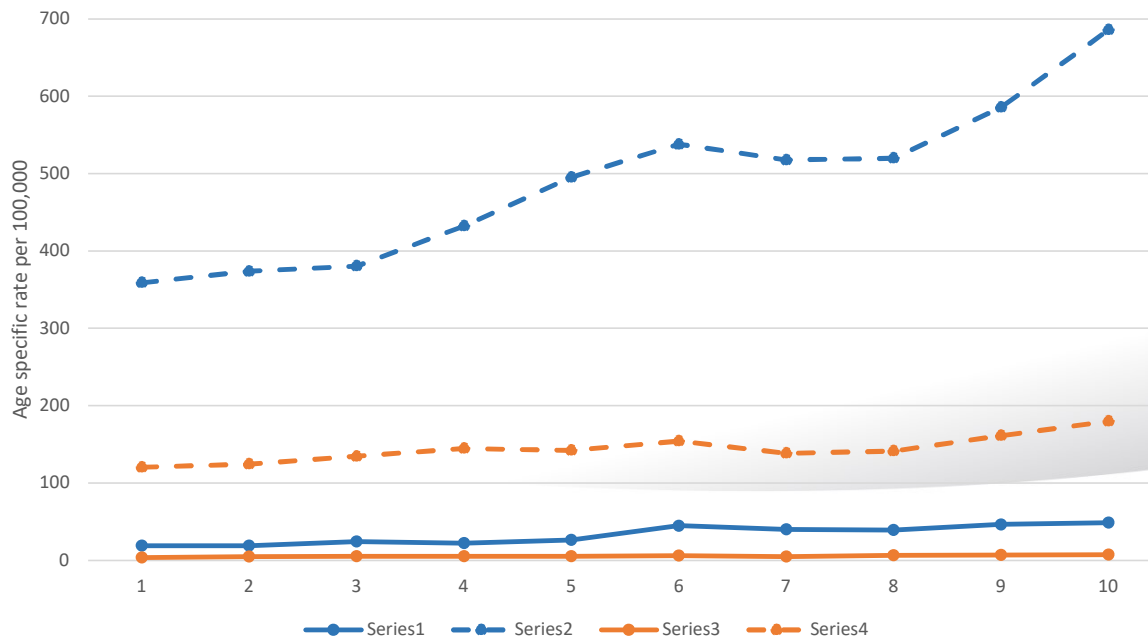
Source: ACER, PISA 2018: Reporting Australia's Results. Volume II Student and School Characteristics: Data tables and Bortoli L 2018, PISA Australia in Focus Number 1: Sense of belonging at school



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Intentional self-harm hospitalisations

Age-specific rates of intentional self-harm hospitalised injury, by age and gender, Australia, 2007–08 to 2016–17



Source: AIHW, [Trends in hospitalised injury, Australia 2007–08 to 2016–17](#), Table S2: Age-specific rates of intentional self-harm hospitalised injury, by age, and sex, Australia, 2007–08 to 2016–17



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Speaking Out Survey 2021 results





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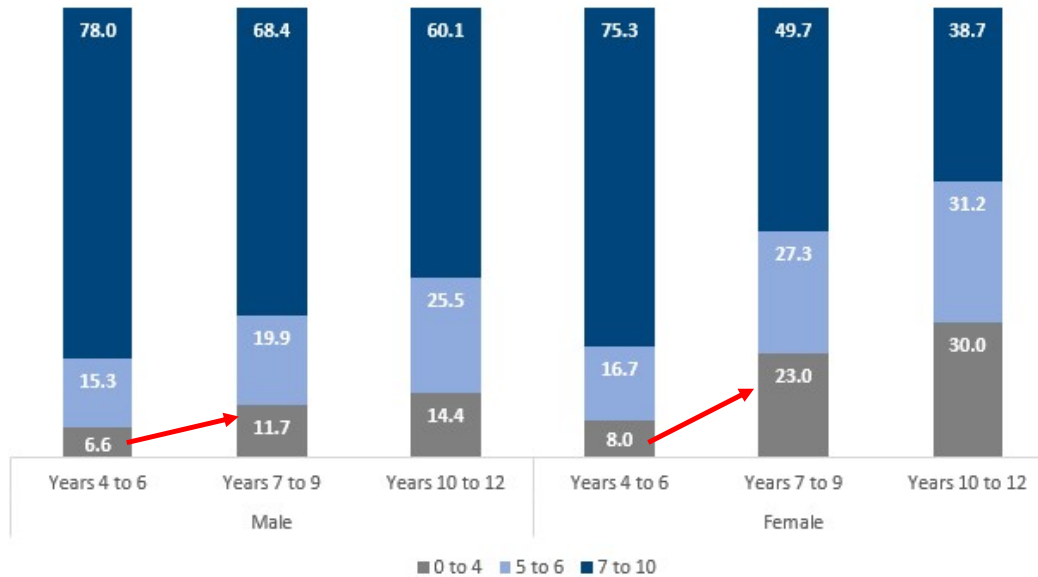
Girls' mental health

- **Less than half** of female high school students reported **high life satisfaction**; 25% reported a very low score
- In Years 10 to 12, **50%** of female students **do not feel good about themselves** (23% of boys)



Life satisfaction

Proportion of Year 7 to 12 students rating their life satisfaction on a scale of '0' to '10' where '0' is the worst possible life and '10' the best possible life

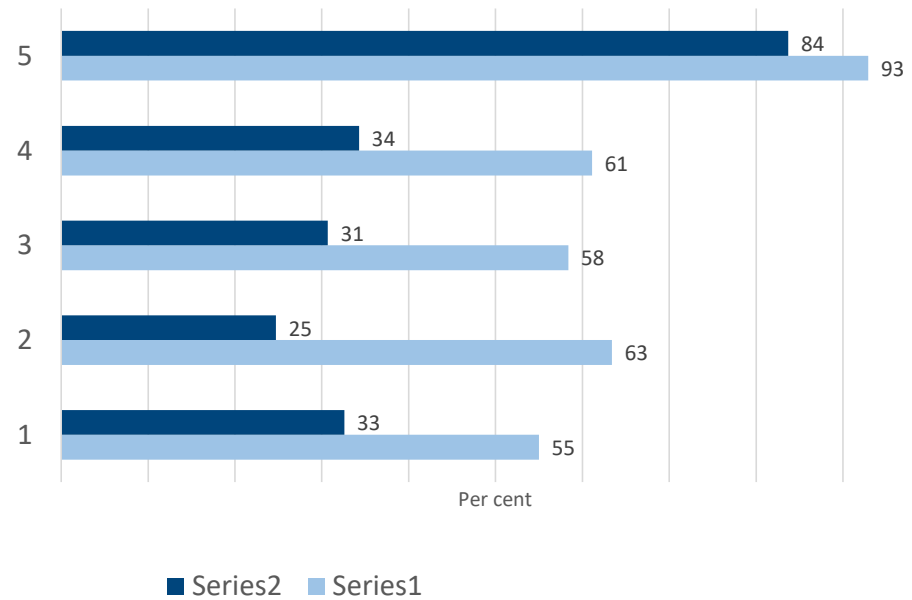




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Sources of stress – gender differences

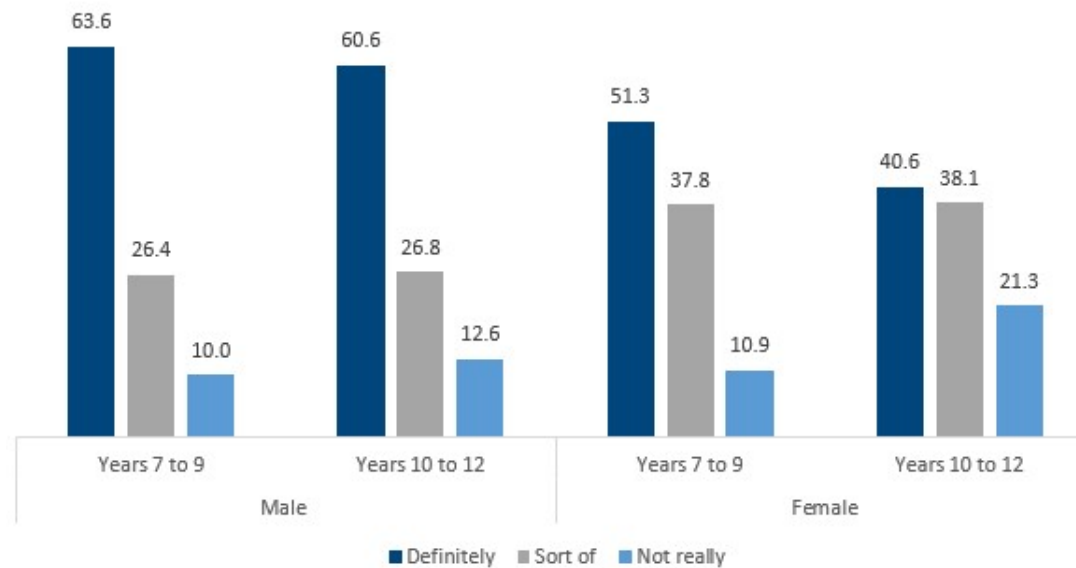
Proportion of students reporting sources of stress in the last 12 months





Importance of exercise

Proportion of Year 7 to Year 12 students reporting that physical activity, sport or exercise is an important part of their life definitely, sort of or not really





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Well for months I was really sad, confused, angry, upset and felt unwanted and I did self harm and didn't tell anyone because I thought I could manage on my own and I was ashamed to tell anyone my problems in case they would judge me for it. (13-year-old)





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Feeling unsafe

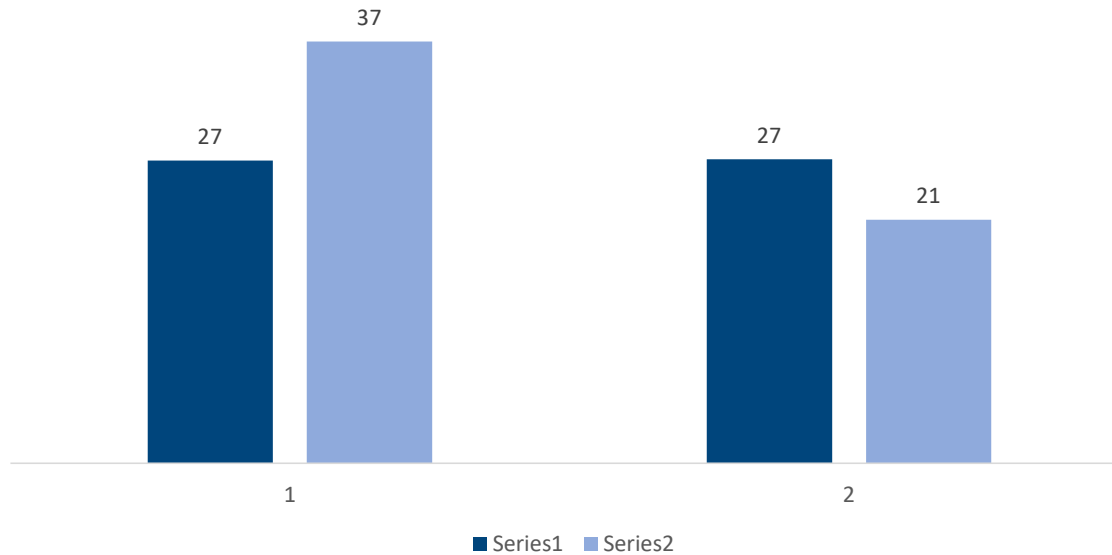
- **One-in-three** girls feel safe in their **local area** only sometimes or less.
- Almost two thirds (63%) of girls who never feel safe in their local area have very low life satisfaction.
- 20% of girls in high school have been cyberbullied (12% of boys).



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Feeling safe in their local area

Proportion of Year 4 to Year 12 students saying they feel safe in their local area 'All the time'

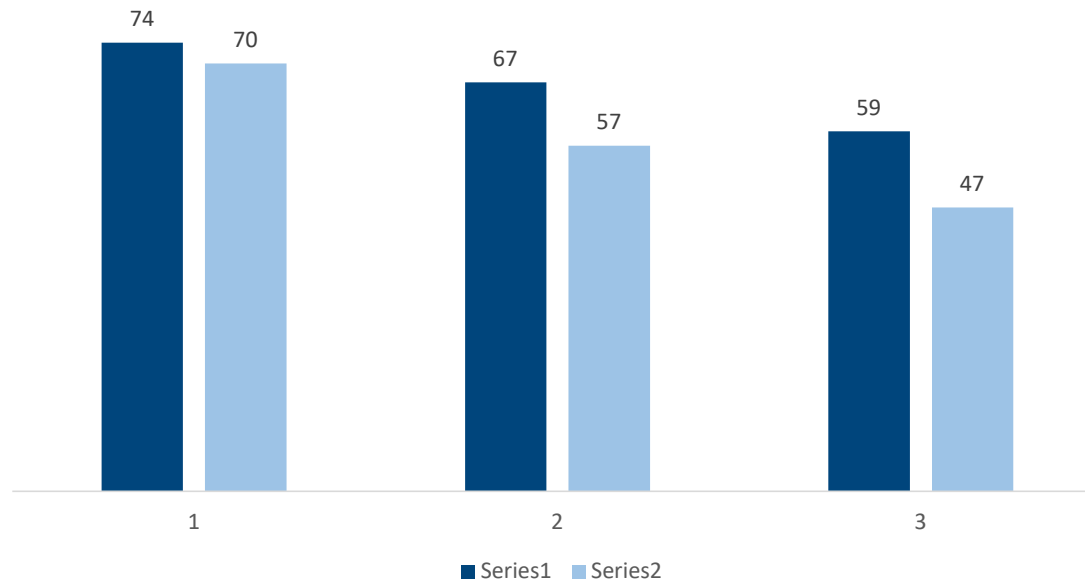




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Belonging in the community

Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students *agreeing* with the statement 'I feel like I belong in my community'





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Young females shouldn't be scared to walk home at night, they shouldn't fear being sexually assaulted/harassed on a daily basis. Instead of teaching women to deal with these things schools should teach men how to behave themselves. (12-year-old)





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Healthy relationships

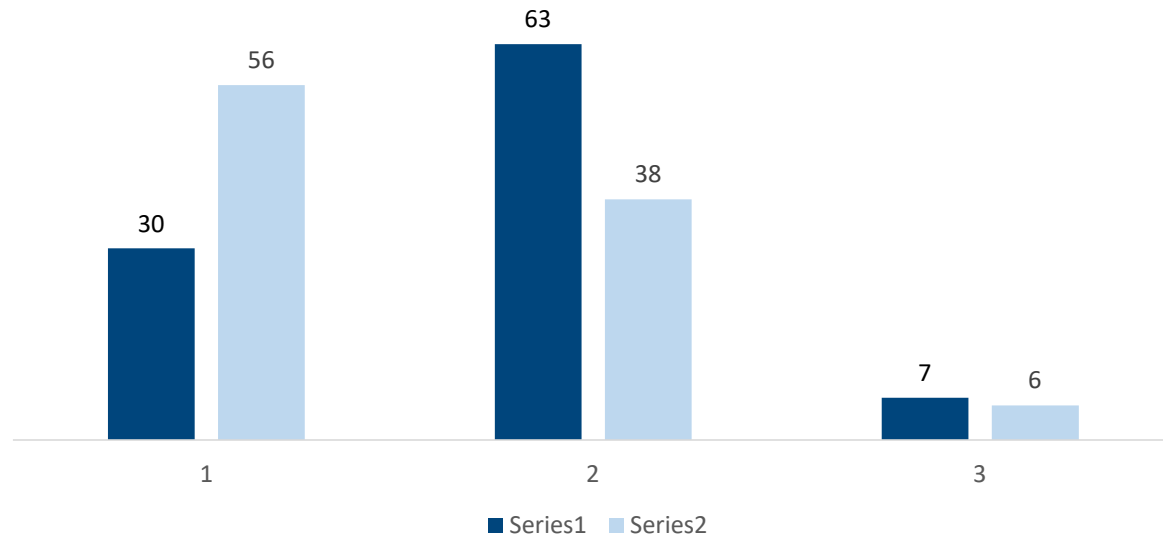
- Around **30%** of students in Years 10 to 12 have had sex.
- **38%** of young people in Years 10 to 12 have only **learnt a little or nothing** about sexual health at school





Unwanted sexual material

Proportion of Year 9 to Year 12 students responding to the question 'Have you ever been sent unwanted sexual material?'





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There should be more learning from year 6 about consent and what is right and wrong a few of my friends have been sexually assaulted (15-year-old)

There is a lack of education about consent within the education system both at my school and at other schools. I am... aware of many occasions where a boys actions has made a girl feel safe and uncomfortable. (17-year-old)

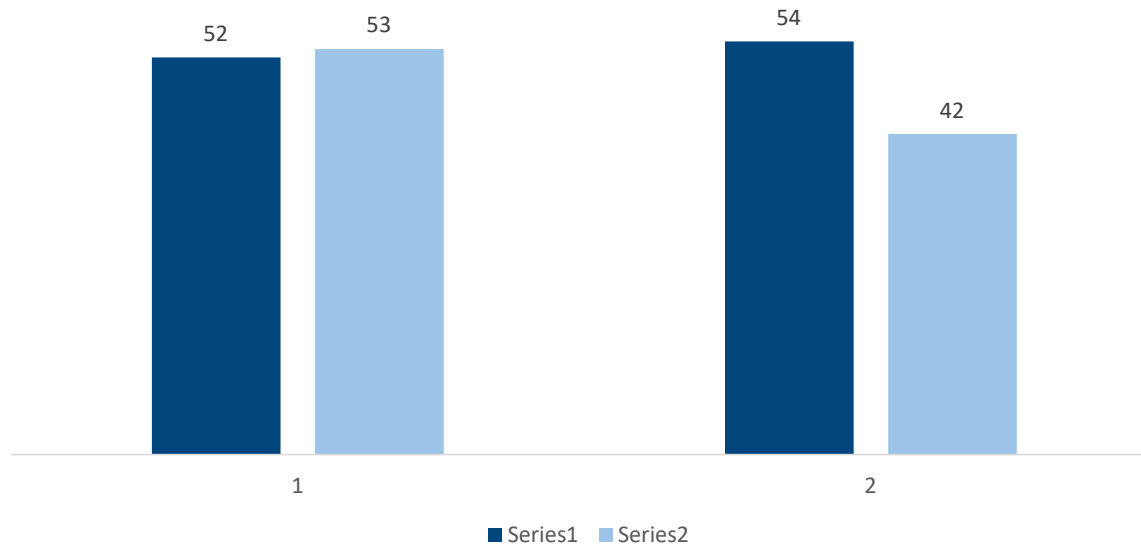




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Supportive relationships

Proportion of Year 4 to 12 students saying it is *very much true* that 'Where I live there is a parent or adult who listens to me when I have something to say'





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With family, it'd help if you understood us before labelling us as disrespectful moody teenagers, just because you were us doesn't mean you're us right now, things have changed and you probably don't remember what it's like to be us. (13-year-old)





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Gender equality

- Only 52 per cent of female students in Years 10 to 12 are allowed to cycle on a main road without an adult (male: 74%).
- 33% of female students in Years 10 to 12 were allowed to go out at night on their own compared to 54% of their male peers and brothers.



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I can take care of myself! If boys can take care of themselves, why can't we? We have arms and legs and eyes and everything a boy has, but we can't do what guys can. Like go out with friends after dark, go for sleep overs, and doing fun things. It's just not fair. (11-year-old)

As a girl I don't feel safe most places due to the world I was raised in. Society has made it so I fear being out because any day I could be hurt. I don't want to grow up as a girl because that means I will be discriminated against and will be payed less. (14-year-old)





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Next steps

- **Girls wellbeing project**

- **Publication** on *Girls wellbeing: Insights from the SOS21 survey* in the next few weeks
- **Advisory Committees** considering girls wellbeing and gender equality
- YARIC project with Aboriginal girls in Kalgoorlie
- **Consultations** in 2nd half of 2022
- Further publications later this year





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