

Gender gaps: Findings from the Youth Survey 2018



MISSION
AUSTRALIA

Youth Survey
2018



We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are the future leaders.

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Executive summary

Females make up just over half of the Australian population. While women compromise roughly half of all employees in Australia, they take home on average nearly \$250 less than men each week.¹ The national gender 'pay gap' stands at 15.3% and has been this way for the past two decades.²

Achievements have been made in educational attainment for females, while the areas of economic participation and opportunity and political empowerment are areas for improvement.³ At universities, in workplaces, in boardrooms and in government, a growing number of women have taken on leadership roles.⁴ Despite this progress, Australia was ranked 35th out of 144 countries in 2017 (declining from 15th in 2006) for gender equality, mainly due to relatively low scores for workforce participation, wage equality and the number of women in Federal Parliament and ministerial positions.⁵ Women and girls continue to experience inequality and discrimination in many important parts of their lives, which can limit their future chances and opportunities.

Our findings in fact demonstrate that females are more likely than males to report the presence of numerous barrier/s that stand in

Gender Gaps: Findings from the Youth Survey 2018 uncovers substantial differences in female's and male's aspirations, values and concerns, as well as their understanding of safety and trust. Many of these differences will have long-term detrimental outcomes for females across a range of life domains, including education, health and employment.

Both females and males have a variety of post school aspirations across a range of fields. Yet females are more likely than males to note *going to university* as their post-school goal, whereas males are proportionately more likely than females to plan to *get an apprenticeship* after finishing school. Despite their high aspirations, females are less likely to report high levels of confidence than males.



¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018b

² Australian Human Rights Commission 2018

³ Australian Human Rights Commission 2018

the way of them achieving their study/work goals after school, moving out of home in the future as well as finding a job.

In terms of young people's perceptions of trust and safety, females were less likely to agree that people in their local area could be trusted; less likely to feel comfortable using public spaces; and less likely to feel safe walking alone after dark. Consequently, females are less likely to be able to access the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

Females were also more likely than males to report high levels of concern about a range of issues, especially those around mental health. Females reported much higher proportions of personal concern about *coping with stress*, *mental health* and *school and study problems* than male respondents. Moreover, females

although *mental health* was the top issue for both males and females.

Interestingly, males reported higher levels of happiness and were more likely to report feeling positive about the future, than females.

Australia has committed to equal rights for men and women through a number of national and international commitments, including the *Convention of the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination*, as well as state-based commitments such as the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Victoria)*. Gender equality has positive impacts across the social, economic and political domains and at both the individual and national level.

Gender Gaps: Findings from the Youth Survey 2018 reveals areas where attention needs to be paid if Australia is to become a more equitable society.



Key findings

For the last 17 years, Mission Australia has conducted an annual survey of young people aged 15 to 19 across Australia. The *Youth Survey 2018* had 28,286 respondents.

The *Youth Survey* collects socio-demographic information and asks young Australians about their current circumstances, values, concerns and aspirations. This paper breaks down the key findings by gender, in order to understand how gender influences young people's responses.

- Although the most frequently chosen post-school plan among all respondents was to *go to university*, a higher proportion of females than males planned to do so (72.9% compared with 59.2%).
- A higher proportion of males than females reported feeling *confident/very confident* in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after finishing school (55.2% compared with 44.3%).
- Females were more likely than males to report the presence of barrier/s across a range of items, including barrier/s to achieving their post school goals, finding work and to moving out of home. Greater proportions of females reported the majority of items were a barrier across all three areas.
- A higher proportion of males than females agreed that they could trust people in their local area (42.1% compared to 35.0%), whilst males tended to feel more comfortable using public spaces than females (71.2% males compared with 63.1% females).
- Females were more likely than males to report feeling *extremely/very concerned* about *personal safety* (21.6% compared to 14.3%).
- While higher proportions of females highly valued *school or study satisfaction* and *mental health* (77.1% and 74.8% compared with 66.3% and 65.5% of males), females were twice as likely to report high levels of concern over *coping with stress* and *mental health* (56.0% and 38.5% compared to 26.2% and 20.4% of males).
- More males than females reported that they participated in or were a spectator of *sport* over the past year (68.2% and 47.1% compared with 60.1% and 36.0%), whereas females were more likely than males to participate in *volunteer work* and *arts/cultural/music activities* (41.2% and 42.0% compared with 31.3% and 29.0%).

Recommendations

- **Young people need improved access to evidence-based and gender-sensitive mental health prevention** and intervention programs through schools and community services.
- **Broader social pressures need to be combatted** that result in higher levels of concern about coping with stress and body image among young females.
- Parents, teachers, schools, and community organisations need to be supported and resourced **to better understand and be responsive to the challenges faced by young females.**
- An increase in Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance payments, as well as increased investment in appropriate and affordable housing for young people is required **to ensure young people have access to a safe home.**
- **Respectful relationship and violence prevention education should be universally provided** to prevent ongoing cycles of domestic and family violence.
- Place-based approaches should be prioritised and **co-designed to improve feelings of community safety for young people**, particularly for young females.
- **Young people's participation in a broad range of activities should be supported** and barriers to participation overcome, including barriers to female participation in sport.

Introduction

Education, work and economic security

Australians generally enjoy high levels of educational attainment. Young women have high academic aspirations and employment expectations—outperforming young men in some areas of education—and are less likely to drop out of school.⁶ Of all women aged 20-24 years in Australia, 92% have attained year 12 qualifications or above, compared to 89% of men in the same age range. Four in ten women aged 25-29 years have attained a bachelor degree or above, compared to three in ten men in the same age bracket.⁷

On the whole, young women are increasingly better educated, yet they are still less likely to undertake studies and career pathways in the more lucrative fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.⁸ Traditional gender stereotypes appear to be affecting the choices and disparities between education and employment pathways.⁹ Educational choices may also be affected by differing expectations about labour market outcomes. For example, young women might plan for intermittent participation in the labour force because of family responsibilities, and therefore avoid fields of study that lead to jobs where long periods of leave may be damaging to career prospects. Instead they choose areas such as

health, welfare, education and administration where flexible work arrangements are more likely to be facilitated.¹⁰

The transition from education into paid work is a crucial moment that lays the foundation for many of the inequalities encountered throughout women's lives.¹¹ While women make up 47% of all employed persons in Australia, their individual income is generally lower than that of men.¹² In 2017, the median starting salary for female undergraduates was \$1100 less than their male peers.¹³ Women working full-time earn on average \$245 per week less than men.¹⁴ The national pay gap between women's and men's full-time weekly earnings currently sits at 15.3%, and has remained stuck between 15% and 19% for the past two decades.¹⁵ One of the key contributors to this gap is women's participation in unpaid work, such as in carer roles for children and other family members.¹⁶ In order to juggle work and family responsibilities, women often work part-time, they constitute 69% of all part-time employees in Australia,¹⁷ which comes at a cost to their long-term career and earning prospects.

Women are also more likely than men to live in households below the poverty line.¹⁸ With more time out of the workforce due to caring responsibilities, a higher rate of part-time employment and unpaid work, the average superannuation balances for retiring-age women are 42% lower than those for men.¹⁹

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018b

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018b

⁸ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2017

⁹ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2017

¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2012

¹¹ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2012

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018a

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018b

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018b

¹⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission 2018

¹⁶ Victoria Government 2018b

¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018b

¹⁸ Davidson et al. 2018

¹⁹ Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2018

Health, wellbeing and safety

Gender inequality can cause significant harm to women's mental and physical health and is a key driver of violence against women.²⁰

Young women experience mental health disorders such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety at a higher rate than young men. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing show that three in ten young women aged 16-24 years had experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months compared to nearly one in four (23%) young males.²¹

Other studies have supported these findings around the prevalence of mental health concerns for females. Mission Australia's *Five Year Mental Health Youth Report* found that females aged 15-19 years were almost twice as likely to have a probable serious mental illness as males.²² The *Five Year Mental Health Youth Report* additionally found that while the proportions of both females and males with probable serious mental illness rose between 2012 and 2016, the increase was much more marked among females (from 23% in 2012 to 29% in 2016, compared to a rise from 13% to 14% for males).²³ This may be associated with family breakdown, school and body image pressures; issues which again numerous *Youth Survey* reports have shown to impact females more than males.²⁴

Young women and men also experience public spaces in very different ways. A survey

commissioned by Plan International Australia and Our Watch suggests that gender can affect young people's perceptions of safety and how they interact and behave on a daily basis within their local community.²⁵ According to the survey, young Australian women aged 15-19 years reported that they feel unsafe in public places, especially after dark, and as a consequence, feel less connected to important public spaces compared to their male peers.

The ABS's 2016 *Personal Safety Survey* collected information about women and men's feelings of general safety. The survey showed that an estimated one in thirteen women felt unsafe walking in their local area alone after dark in the past 12 months, compared to one in twenty men. The survey also found that an estimated one in four women did not walk in their local area alone after dark in the past 12 months because they felt unsafe compared to one in twenty-four men.²⁶

The same survey also highlighted that females from the age of 15 were almost three times more likely to experience violence by a current and/or previous partner, compared with males (17% compared to 6%). Young women aged 18-24 years were the most likely to experience sexual harassment: around two in five women reported being sexually harassed in the past 12 months.

Gender inequalities of varying forms—social, economic, political—thus impact upon women's lives from a young age, and indeed across their lifespan.

²⁰ Kwok et al. 2017, 6

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008

²² Mission Australia 2017a

²³ Mission Australia 2017a

²⁴ See for example: Mission Australia 2017a; Carlisle et al. 2018; Cave et al. 2015; Bailey et al. 2016; Bullock et al. 2017

²⁵ Plan International Australia 2016

²⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017



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youth survey

This report provides key insights into the gender differences between responses to the *Mission Australia Youth Survey 2018*. In 2018, Mission Australia conducted its 17th annual survey of young people, receiving 28,286 responses from young people aged 15-19 years.

About the Youth Survey 2018

As well as collecting valuable socio-demographic data, each year the *Youth Survey* seeks to capture the views and perspectives of young people on a broad range of issues. We use the Youth Survey data in this report to compare the responses of female and male respondents across a range of issues and questions, with a specific focus on:

- aspirations for study and work;
- barriers to the achievement of study/work goals after school (data from 2017);²⁷
- barriers to finding employment and moving out of home;
- feelings of trust and safety within the community;

- values and concerns;
- participation in activities; and,
- feelings about the future.

Sample breakdown

A total of 28,286 young people aged 15 to 19 years responded to Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2018*. Respondents came from across Australia and Table 1 below indicates the number and percentage of respondents from each Australian State/Territory. There were 17 respondents who did not indicate which state/territory they lived in.

²⁷ Demographic information for the *Youth Survey 2017* can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 1: Number/percentage of respondents by State/Territory

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents %
ACT	336	1.2
NSW	8,211	29.0
NT	154	0.5
QLD	5,769	20.4
SA	3,767	13.3
TAS	1,715	6.1
VIC	5,132	18.1
WA	3,202	11.3

Note: Further demographic information for the *Youth Survey 2018* can be found in Appendix 1.

Demographic breakdown

Over half (55.0%) of respondents to the *Youth Survey 2018* were female and 41.7% were male. There were 1.6% respondents who provided the response 'other' and 1.7% respondents who did not give a response.

A slightly higher proportion of male than female respondents to the *Youth Survey 2018* identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (6.3% compared with 4.5%), while a greater proportion of males (6.8%) than females (3.9%) reported they were living with a disability.

Aspirations for study and future work

Aspirations that are formed in adolescence towards future education and employment play a critical role in the transition from school into work, training or further education. The development of aspirations begins early and is strongly influenced by a young person's family, community and the area in which a young person grows and develops.²⁸

However, high levels of educational attainment do not always translate into advantages in the workforce. When young women graduate from university and enter the workforce they already face a wage gap. Females are paid less in 17 out of 19 fields of employment, with dentistry experiencing the biggest wage gap at 21%. However, in engineering, which is a predominantly male industry, the pay gap is reversed as women are paid slightly more.

When comparing the results between females and males, a slightly greater proportion of female than male respondents reported that they were studying full-time (95.4% compared with 93.0%), while a slightly higher proportion of males than females reported not studying at all (4.4% compared with 2.7%). Over twice the proportion of males than females indicated that they did not intend to complete Year 12 (5.5% compared with 2.1% respectively).

Respondents who were currently studying were asked how satisfied they were with their studies.

²⁸ Butler and Muir 2017

The majority of both females and males indicated high levels of study satisfaction; however, females reported a slightly higher level of satisfaction with their studies than males (70.4% compared with 67.6%

respectively). A marginally higher proportion of males indicated they were *very dissatisfied* or *dissatisfied with their studies* (7.6% compared with 5.9%).

Table 2: Satisfaction with studies

	Females %	Males %
Very satisfied	12.2	13.6
Satisfied	58.2	54.0
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	23.6	24.7
Dissatisfied	4.7	5.7
Very dissatisfied	1.2	1.9

Those respondents who were still at school were also asked what they planned to do after finishing school.

Figure 1 shows that, although the most frequently cited post-school plan among both females and males was to *go to university*, a higher proportion of females than males stated that they planned to do so (72.9% compared with 59.2%).

A greater proportion of female respondents also reported *travel/gap year* plans after leaving school (33.8% compared with 22.4% of males).

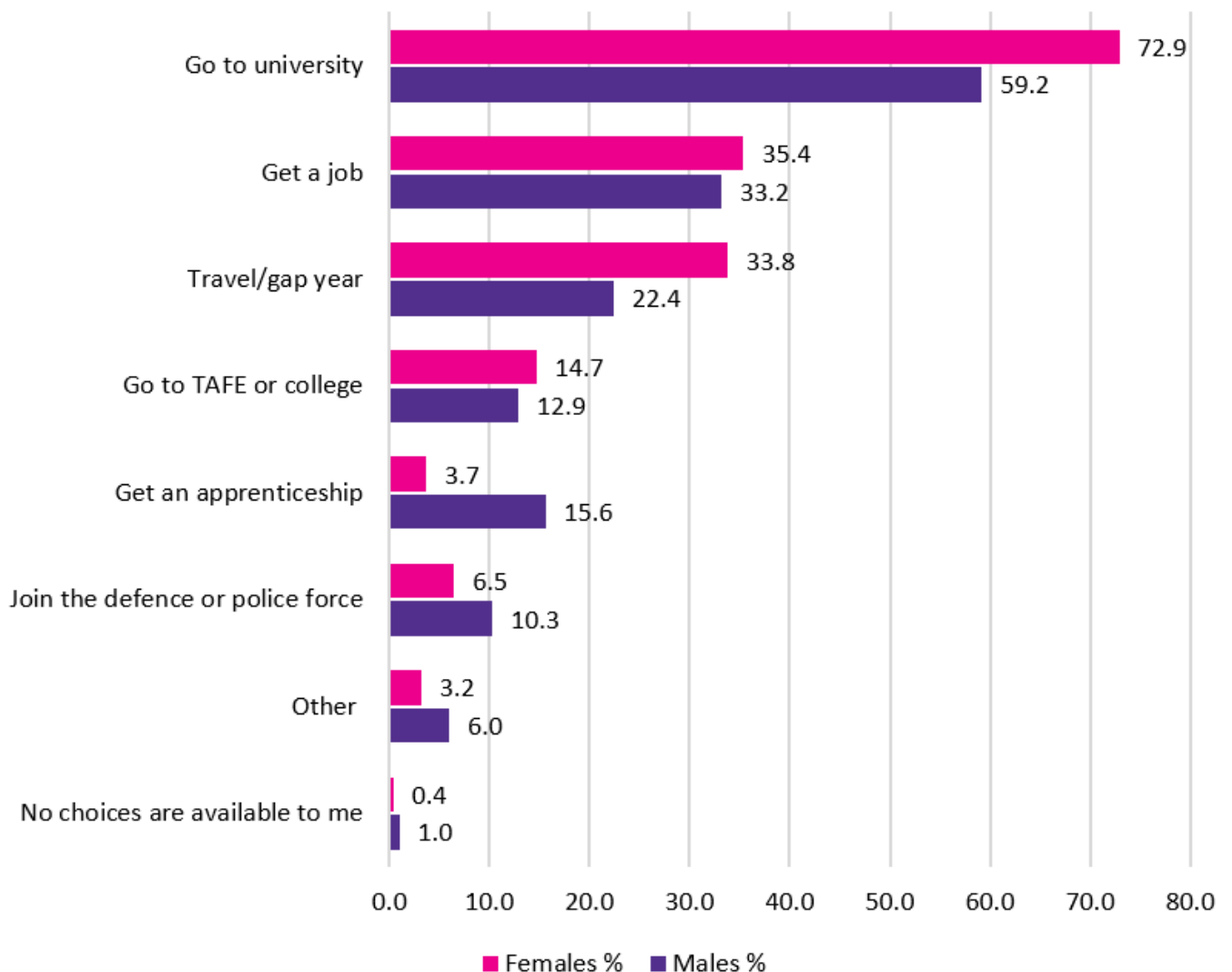
Conversely, almost five times the proportion of males indicated that they were planning to *get an apprenticeship* (15.6% compared with 3.7% of females).

Respondents were asked how confident they were in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after finishing school. As shown in Table 3, a higher proportion of males than females reported feeling *extremely confident* or *very confident* in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after finishing school (55.2% compared with 44.3%).

Table 3: Confidence in achieving study/work goals

	Females %	Males %
Extremely confident	8.3	13.5
Very confident	36.0	41.7
Somewhat confident	44.4	37.2
Slightly confident	8.4	5.5
Not at all confident	2.8	2.1

Figure 1: Plans after leaving school



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of overall national frequency in the *Youth Survey Report 2018*.

Barriers to the achievement of young people's study/work goals after school

Whilst recognising that young people aspire to further education, training or employment, and experience a degree of confidence, the Youth Survey also seeks to understand what barrier/s young people may feel

in terms of achieving their post school goals. Consequently, in 2017 and 2018 young people were asked a number of questions relating to their perceived barriers in achieving a number of outcomes in terms of education, employment and moving out of home.

In 2017, respondents who were still at school were asked to indicate whether they felt there were any barriers that may impact on the achievement of their study/work goals after school. A greater proportion of females (56.3%) than males (44.2%) reported the presence of barrier/s.

Respondents who reported the presence of barrier/s were then asked to indicate from a number of items which barrier/s they saw as preventing them from achieving their goals after school. As Figure 2 highlights, a greater proportion of females than males indicated that all items were a barrier on them achieving their study/work goals after school.

As shown in Figure 2, the top three barriers for females were *academic ability*, *financial difficulty* and *mental health*, while for males the top barrier was *academic ability*, followed by *financial difficulty* and *admission/job requirements* in equal proportions.

Around twice the proportion of females than males indicated that *academic ability*, *mental health* and *financial difficulty* were barriers which may impact on their study/work goals after school (26.2%, 16.9%, 17.9% compared with 16.3%, 7.4% and 8.9% respectively).

Employment and barriers to finding work

Young people need to develop the skills and capabilities to be able to work, regardless of their post school plans. Employment provides young people with financial independence while they are studying, but for others it offers a career pathway, and for others it is an economic necessity. The *Youth Survey* asked respondents if they had paid employment and, if so, to specify how many hours they worked in an average week.

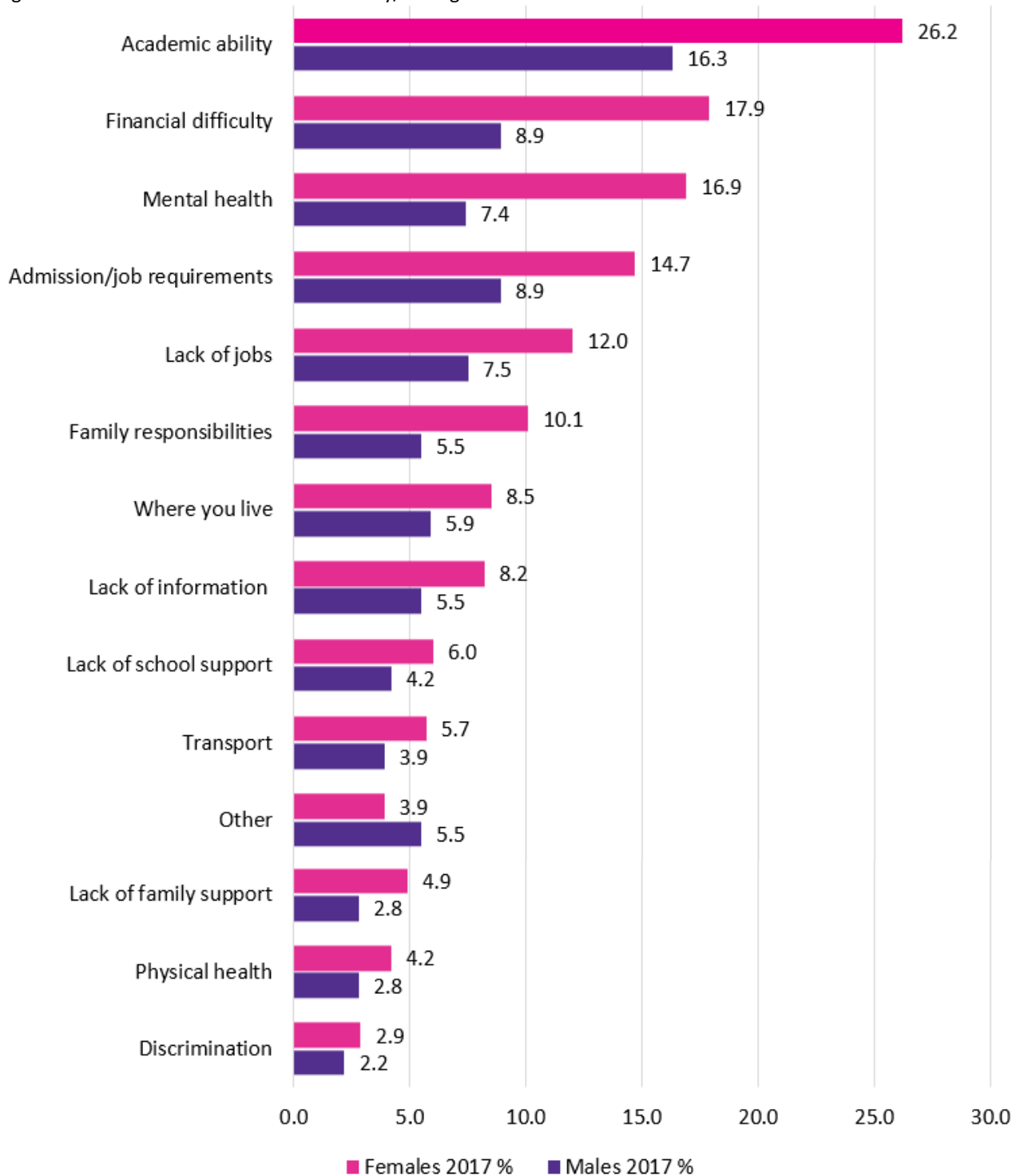
As shown in Table 4, similarly marginal proportions of young females and males reported full-time employment (0.5% compared with 0.8%), while a higher proportion of female respondents were employed part-time (46.3% compared with 36.7% of males).

Conversely, a greater proportion of male respondents were looking for work (37.5% compared with 32.7% of females).

Table 4: Participation in paid employment

	Females %	Males %
Employed full-time	0.5	0.8
Employed part-time	46.3	36.7
Not in paid employment, looking for work	32.7	37.5
Not in paid employment, NOT looking for work	20.5	24.9

Figure 2: Barriers to the achievement of study/work goals



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of overall national frequency in the *Youth Survey Report 2017*.

Barriers to finding work

Additionally, in 2018, young people were asked whether they felt there are any barrier/s which were impacting upon them finding work. Certain groups experience barriers differently, with some groups disproportionately experiencing these at a higher rate. Significantly, a notably higher proportion of females (42.8%) than males (32.9%) reported the presence of barrier/s that were impacting upon them finding work.

As shown in Figure 3, the top three barriers for both females and males were *school responsibilities*, *lack of skills/experience* and *lack of jobs*.

- **Compared with males, females were more likely to indicate every item was a barrier impacting upon them finding work.**

Barriers to moving out of home

Most young people will live at home during their adolescent years and into their mid-20s. However, for some young people, they may shift away from home for a number of reasons, such as to be near study opportunities, to be independent, because of conflict with their parents or because they had been asked to leave. To understand young people's perception of barriers that may impact upon them moving out of home in the future the *Youth Survey 2018* asked a number of questions to recognise some of the challenges they face.

As shown in Figure 4, the top three barriers for both females and males were *housing costs (e.g. rent, utilities)*, *financial stability* and *availability of housing*.

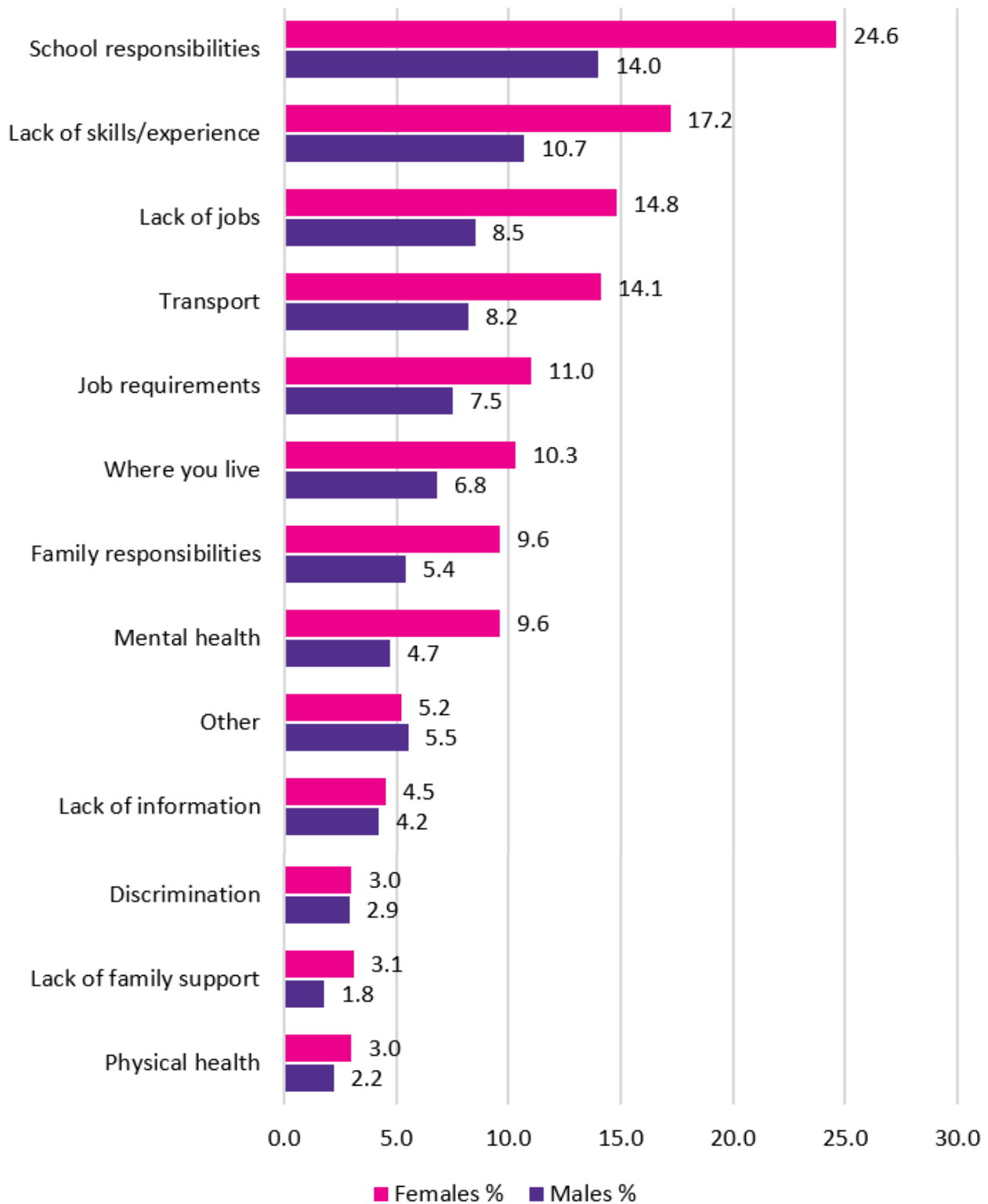
Key insights

- A notably higher proportion of females saw *school responsibilities* as a major barrier that was impacting on their finding work (24.6% compared to 14.0% of males).
- Higher proportions of females also indicated *lack of skills/experience* and *lack of jobs* were impacting upon their finding work (17.2% and 14.8% compared with 10.7% and 8.5% of males).
- Females were also more likely than males to indicate *transport* and *mental health* were barriers impacting upon their finding work (14.1% and 9.6% compared with 8.2% and 4.7% respectively).

There were some notable differences in the proportion of young females and males reporting barriers to moving out of home. In particular:

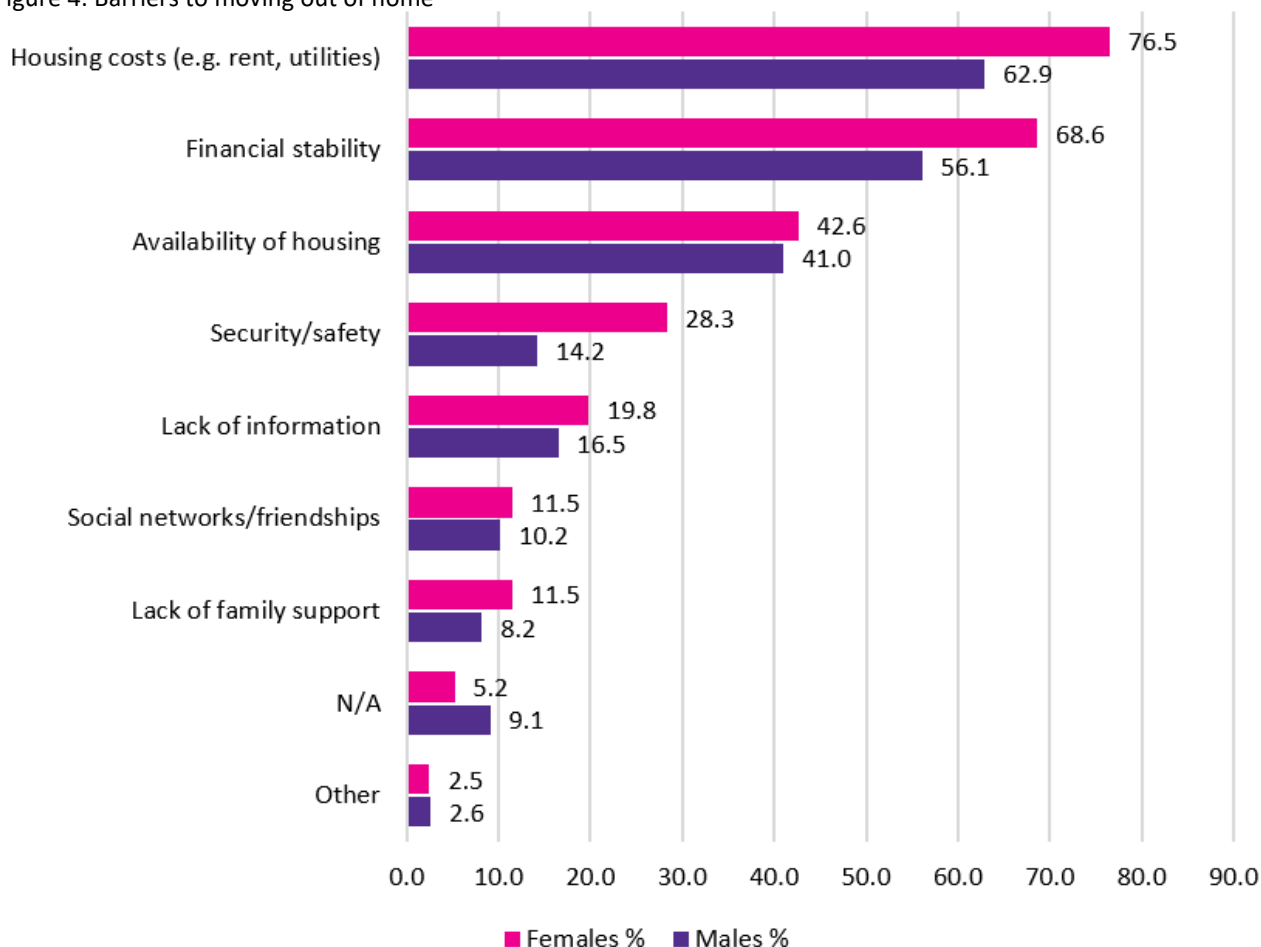
- Much higher proportions of females than males reported *housing costs (e.g. rent, utilities)* and *financial stability* as barriers to moving out of home (76.5% and 68.6% compared with 62.9% and 56.1% respectively).
- Compared to males, twice the proportion of females also reported *security/safety* was a potential barrier to moving out of home in the future (28.3% compared with 14.2%).

Figure 3: Barriers to finding work



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of overall national frequency.

Figure 4: Barriers to moving out of home



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of overall national frequency in the *Youth Survey Report 2018*.

Combined, the *Youth Survey* results highlight that females more often experience, or are more greatly aware of, the range of barriers that can impact upon them realising their full potential.

More females reported being worried about their academic performance, school responsibilities, financial security and safety than their male peers. They are more likely to report the presence of barrier/s and also at a higher proportion across the majority of items.

In fact, they were more concerned about almost every topic or barrier offered. These results are indicative of the high pressures placed on young women, and of their comparatively high levels of anxiety and stress, which can have lifelong consequences unless addressed.

“The pressure from family, friends, teachers and peers to reach this high standard of grades puts a lot of pressure and stress on me.”

(F, 15, TAS)

“Not believing in myself has affected me widely as it has given me some doubt for my future...”

(F, 16, SA)

Trust and safety in the community

The *Youth Survey* asks questions to understand young people's perceptions of safety, including if respondents can trust people in local spaces, feel comfortable in using public spaces and if they felt safe walking alone after dark.

Feeling safe is integral to healthy development; while conversely feeling unsafe has a range of negative outcomes, importantly in terms of education, health and employment.

A sense of place-based attachment is linked to increased feelings of positive wellbeing, high levels of personal resilience, and stronger social connection to local community members and organisations. Young people who feel safe in the community are more likely to participate in social activities.

The Youth Survey 2018 results show that for each of these questions, young females were more likely to show concerns over safety and trust in the community than males.

Key insights

- Higher proportions of males *strongly agree* or *agree* that they can trust most people in their local area (42.1% compared with 35.0% of females).
- Males tended to feel *very comfortable* or *comfortable* using public spaces (71.2% compared with 63.1% for females).
- Females were less likely than males to report feeling safe to walk alone after dark in their community. More than double the proportion of females reported feeling *unsafe* or *very unsafe* (46.6% compared with 18.1% of males).
- Females were also more likely to report feeling *extremely/very concerned* about *personal safety* than males (21.6% compared with 14.3%) (Figure 6.)
- Females are slightly more likely to report crime, safety and violence as an important issue in Australia (14.2% compared with 12.7%) (Table 8.)

Table 5: Whether people in the local area can be trusted

	Females %	Males %
Strongly agree	4.7	8.3
Agree	30.3	33.8
Neither agree nor disagree	45.2	37.6
Disagree	14.7	13.5
Strongly disagree	5.2	6.8

Table 6: Comfort using public spaces in local area

	Females %	Males %
Very comfortable	15.6	25.3
Comfortable	47.5	46.2
Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable	24.5	19.0
Uncomfortable	9.9	6.7
Very uncomfortable	2.6	2.8

These results align with research commissioned by the Plan International Australia and Our Watch. Their 2016 survey revealed that 30% of young Australian women aged 15-19 avoid public places after dark, with approximately 23% believing it is not safe to travel alone on public transport.²⁹ According to the Plan International report, many young women think public spaces are unsafe for them, particularly after dark, despite statistics that highlight young women are more at risk of violence at home.

The lack of trust and safety evidenced in these studies have major implications for young women's public engagement and participation, their access to spaces and services, and their ability to move freely in public places.

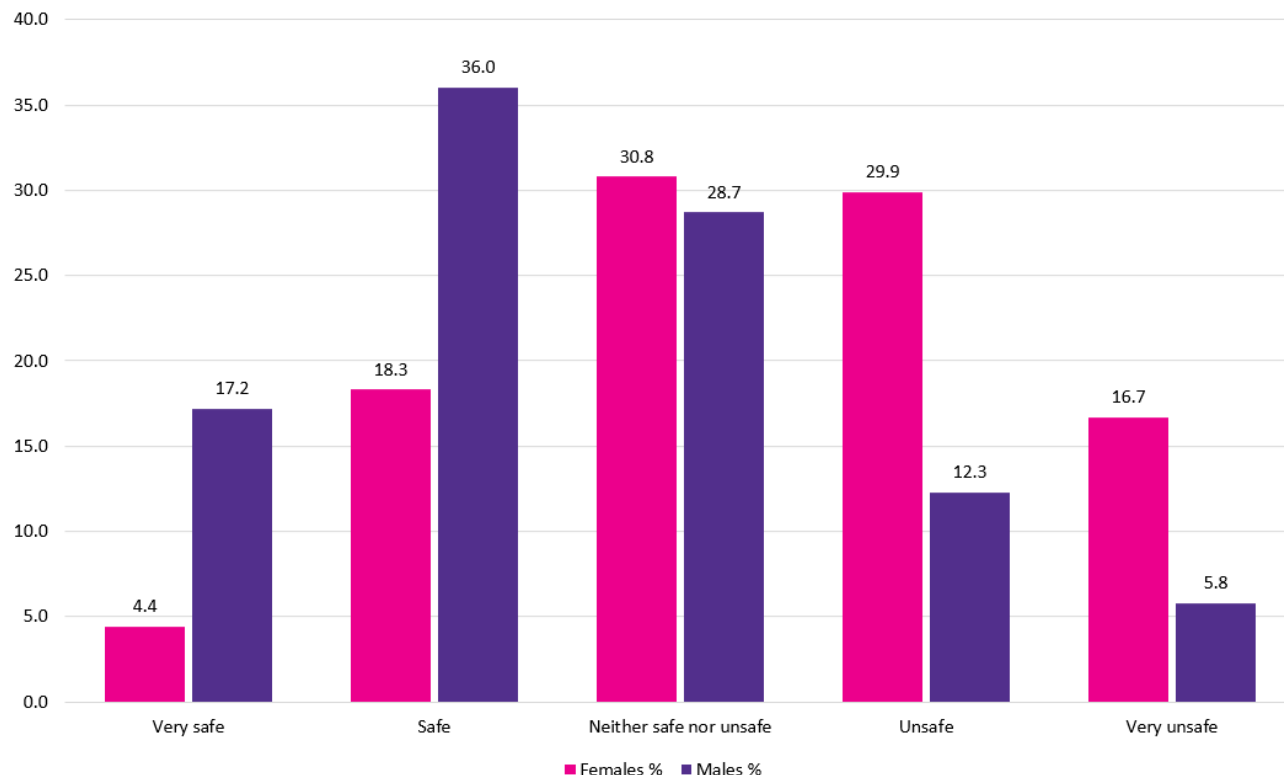
This may lead to young females feeling they do not have the same rights as their male peers to participate in activities outside of their home or use public places.

"Personally, I am concerned of my safety and the safety of other young women around me when it comes to walking in the street alone and doing other every-day activities as there is the prolonged fear that we will be raped, abused, and murdered..."
(F, 18, VIC)

"Some people might not want to leave their house because they don't feel safe. Make sure people are feeling secure where they are and who they're surrounded by."
(F, 17, VIC)

²⁹ Plan International Australia 2016

Figure 5: Feelings of safety when walking alone in local area after dark



Values, concerns and issues

Young people have to work through a range of issues as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. Some of the issues that they may have to deal with include school and study stress, pressures from friends, changes in family structure, alcohol and drug use, and sex and sexuality. To help understand young people's needs better, Mission Australia asks a range of questions about their values and concerns.

Understanding what young people value is important as it helps us recognise their motivations, current needs, and priorities. To get an understanding of young people's values and concerns the *Youth Survey* asks young people to rate how much they value *family relationships, friendships (other than family), school or study satisfaction, physical and mental health, financial security and getting a job*.

Additionally, knowing what concerns young people, both personally and nationally, gives an insight into the range of issues that are important to them, which effect their wellbeing. It also gives an insight into how we can support them to deal with these issues.

The *Youth Survey* collects information on concerns through two different questions. Firstly, we ask young people how personally concerned they were about a number of issues on a five-point scale (from *extremely concerned* to *not at all concerned*). The responses in Figure 6 below combine the *extremely* and *very concerned* responses. Secondly, we ask young people what they see are the most important issues facing Australia today (see Table 7).

The findings from these questions suggest that there are some important differences between female and male respondents.

Key insights

- Greater proportions of females highly valued *school or study satisfaction* and *mental health* (77.1% and 74.8% compared with 66.3% and 65.5% of males).



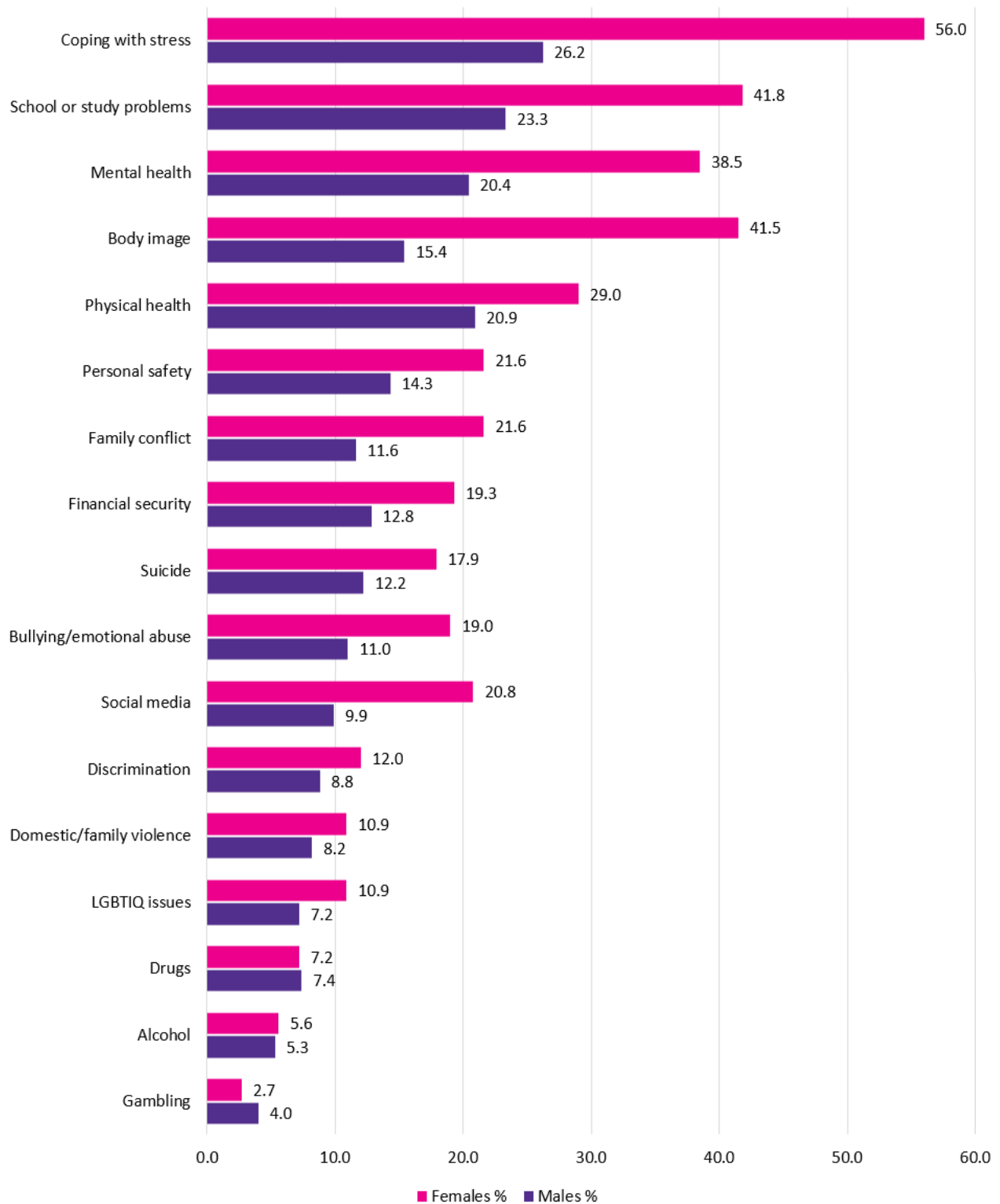
- Close to twice the proportion of females were personally concerned about *coping with stress* (56.0% compared with 26.2% for males).
- Four in ten females were personally concerned about *body image* compared with around one in six males (41.5% compared with 15.4%).
- Almost double the proportions of females were *extremely or very concerned* about *school or study problems* and *mental health* (41.8% and 38.5% compared with 23.3% and 20.4% of males).
- More than twice the proportion of females reported *social media* was an issue of personal concern (20.8% compared with 9.9% of males).
- A greater proportion of female than male respondents identified *mental health* (49.2% compared with 35.9%) and *equity and discrimination* (25.0% compared with 21.2%) as important issues facing Australia today.

Table 7: What young people value

	Females %	Males %
Family relationships	86.3	82.0
Friendships (other than family)	83.1	81.1
School or study satisfaction	77.1	66.3
Mental health	74.8	65.5
Physical health	69.1	70.0
Financial security	57.7	54.8
Getting a job	48.3	46.4

Note: The values presented here are the summed responses for *extremely important* and *very important* for each item. Items are listed in order of overall national frequency.

Figure 6: Issues of personal concern to young people



Note: The values presented here are the summed responses for *extremely concerned* and *very concerned* for each item. Items are listed in order of overall national frequency.

Young people were asked to list the three issues they considered were most important in Australia today. The information provided by respondents was categorised and is listed in Table 8.

Mental health, alcohol and drugs and *equity and discrimination* were the top three issues for both females and males. However, there were some notable differences expressed by young females and males regarding their national issues of concern.

A greater proportion of female than male respondents identified *mental health* (49.2% compared with 35.9%) and *equity and discrimination* (25.0% compared with 21.2%) as important issues facing Australia today. Conversely, a greater proportion of male than female respondents identified *alcohol and drugs* as a key national issue (32.2% compared with 26.4%).

Since 2016, *mental health* and *bullying* have increasingly been identified as key issues facing the nation. Between 2016 and 2018, the proportion males indicating *mental health* as an important issue in Australia increased by 21.8% (from 14.1% to 35.9%) and almost doubled for females (from 26.2% to 49.2%).

Females identified issues surrounding education, work/life balance, and social pressures to conform to unrealistic expectations. Females also identified coping with stress, school or study problems and concerns about body image, which have strong links to mental health. Female's concerns around mental health surface recurrently throughout this report.

Table 8: Most important issue in Australia today

	Females 2018 %	Males 2018 %	Females 2017 %	Males 2017 %	Females 2016 %	Males 2016 %
Mental health	49.2	35.9	38.5	27.8	26.2	14.1
Alcohol and drugs	26.4	32.2	29.6	36.1	26.9	31.1
Equity and discrimination	25.0	21.2	30.3	23.3	29.5	24.4
Bullying	20.3	14.1	11.7	9.5	12.3	7.8
Crime, safety and violence	14.2	12.7	11.5	11.4	14.0	11.6
Health	11.0	11.9	8.2	8.6	10.4	10.2
The economy and financial matters	10.0	13.8	11.7	14.1	13.2	16.6
Homelessness/housing	9.8	8.6	9.5	6.6	8.9	6.1
The environment	9.1	9.3	12.0	9.6	12.3	10.9
Education	8.4	8.0	13.3	12.8	11.9	11.5

The YWCA 'She Speaks' survey of 1600 young women aged 15-30 years shows similar results to those presented here.³⁰ The 'She Speaks' survey highlights young women's concerns regarding obstacles and barriers in achieving their full potential. According to the 'She Speaks' survey, young women reported that negative gender-based stereotypes damage their working lives, their sense of self, their safety

in relationships, and their leadership capacity. Young women felt a large amount of pressure to be 'perfect' and scrutinised for their appearance. They were highly concerned about the portrayal of women in media and society, which pressures them to fit into certain norms and expectations.³¹

"I think that body image needs to be a more talked about topic as social media impacts many people, especially girls and can cause you think about your body in a negative light."

(F, 15, QLD)

"We need to accept that body image problems are more present than we want to believe. The amount of girls and boys in high school struggling with eating disorders is scary."

(F, 15, TAS)

Participation in activities

The importance of community participation is well established. Community participation ensures that young people have a sense of belonging, feel part of the community and are given opportunities to participate in activities and events that allow them to develop relationships with others.

Our results show that females participate in a broad range of activities; however, their participation rate in *sport* (as both a participant and a spectator) is lower than that of males.

- Larger proportions of males than females were involved in *sports (as a participant)* and *sports (as a spectator)* over the past year (68.2% and 47.1% compared with 60.1% and 36.0%).

- Conversely, greater proportions of female than male respondents were involved in *arts/cultural/music activities* and *volunteer work* (42.0% and 41.2% compared with 29.0% and 31.4% respectively).

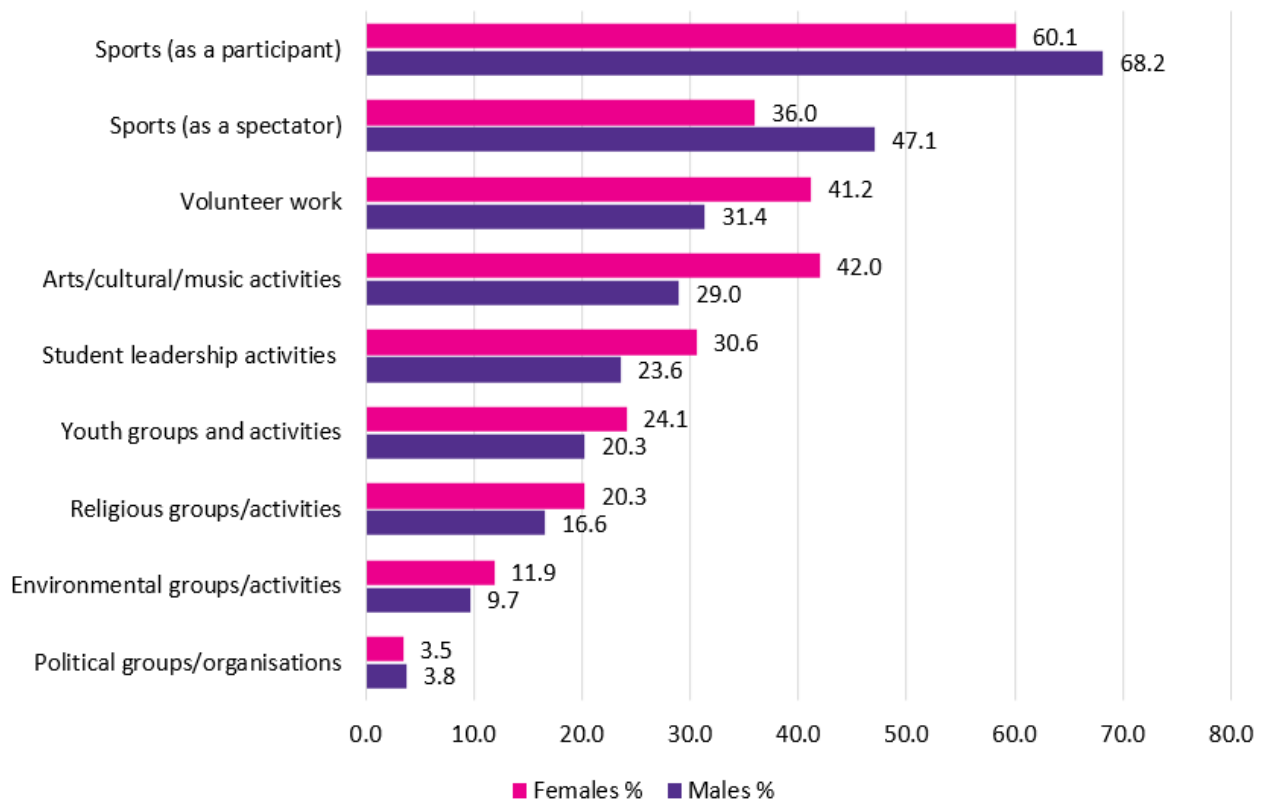
Sport can change the way females see themselves and the way communities perceive them. Seeing women play sport challenges gender norms and assumptions about their capability, status and value in society. It can also help people see beyond their prejudices and help to break down barriers.³²

³⁰ Baffour, Kapelle, and Smith 2015

³¹ See also Harper and Tiggemann 2008; Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2015; Andrew, Tiggemann, and Clark 2015

³² Victoria Government 2018a; Victoria Government 2019

Figure 7: Activities young people were involved in over the past year



Note: Items are listed in order of overall national frequency.

Happiness and the future

Happiness is a state of mind or mood, which reflects young people's satisfaction with their life and relationships. Young people were asked to rate how happy they were with their life as a whole.

Table 9 shows that a greater proportion of males reported feeling *happy/very happy* with their lives

as a whole than females (67.8% compared with 59.1%).

Young people were also asked how positive they felt about the future. As shown in Table 10, a higher proportion of males than females reported feeling *very positive* or *positive* about the future (66.5% compared with 59.9%).

Table 9: How happy young people are

	Females %	Males %
Happy/Very happy (70-100)	59.1	67.8
Not happy or sad (40-60)	30.5	24.0
Very sad/Sad	6.6	8.1

Table 10: Feelings about the future

	Females %	Males %
Very positive	13.2	18.4
Positive	46.7	48.1
Neither positive nor negative	30.5	24.4
Negative	7.1	6.2
Very negative	2.6	2.9

Implications for policy and practice

This analysis of the *Youth Survey* results by gender points to key differences and policy implications across several areas, including mental health, wellbeing and confidence; housing; safety and trust; and, participation and inclusion. These themes are discussed and key recommendations set out in the following.

Mental health

Mental Health is a key issue affecting young people, with a higher proportion of females than males indicating mental health was a key national concern (49.2% compared with 35.9%).

We must listen to young people's voices—especially as this response includes almost half of the females surveyed—and invest in mental health, as it is the issue they believe to be most important in Australia today.

Moreover, the top four issues of personal concern to young people in 2018 each relate to young people's mental health: were *coping with stress* (43.1%), *school or study problems* (33.8%) mental health (30.9%), and *body image* (30.4%).

However these concerns were exacerbated for females: body image was their third most important issue of personal concern (41.5%), at a rate more than double that of males (15.4%). Four in ten females were concerned about *body image* compared with fewer than one in six males.

The prevalence of females' concern around body image has been attributed to the pervasive influence of how the media portrays a particular standard of beauty for young women.³³ That said, young men are not exempt from body image pressures and unrealistic portrayals in the media, either. Social media in particular can lead to body dissatisfaction for both males and females.³⁴

Enhancing media and social media literacy through school programs or social marketing campaigns may have a protective effect in relation to body image and should be promoted.³⁵ Over the longer term, the media, social media, fashion and advertising industries need to take greater responsibility for the impact they are having on young people's body image and mental health and present more positive, diverse and realistic portrayals of young people.³⁶

Mental health (cont.)

Both females and males indicated *coping with stress* was their top issue of personal concern. However, close to twice the proportion of females were concerned about *coping with stress* than their male counterparts (56.0% compared with 26.2% of males). We know that for young people, stress can trigger underlying vulnerabilities that result in mental illness.³⁷ In addition, almost twice the proportion of females were extremely concerned or very concerned about *school or study problems* and *mental health*.

Shine and Strength Program

The Shine and Strength personal development program aims to equip participants with the knowledge and skills needed to develop self-awareness and personal growth. These nine-week programs are facilitated in various middle schools and youth detention centres throughout Darwin.

ShineGIRL and STRENGTH programs are adaptable tools that are used to reach young females and males. Each session is delivered as a 60 to 90-minute presentation that covers topics such as self-worth, emotional wellbeing, healthy relationships, and behaviours.

Early intervention programs are crucial for young people to prevent issues escalating and need to take into account the high levels of personal concern around stress and mental health expressed by young females.

Co-design of services with young people that is underpinned by an understanding of young female's and male's preferences for help seeking and the particular concerns, pressures and challenges they face is also crucial.³⁸

³³ Grogan 2017, 103–34; Harper and Tiggemann 2008; Hawkins et al. 2004

³⁴ Lewis 2012

³⁵ Andrew, Tiggemann, and Clark 2015; Tiggemann and Zaccardo 2015

³⁶ Victorian Parliament Family and Community Development Committee 2005

³⁷ Black Dog Institute 2018

³⁸ Baker and Rice 2017, 7

Happy Health Minds Program (Cooma, Albury and Tumut)

The Happy Healthy Minds Program provides a range of flexible, responsive, non-clinical mental health support services to meet the needs of young people aged between 8-18 years who are affected by or at risk of mental illness.

The service offers holistic case management, information and referrals to other services, practical and home-based support, education and community development as well as programs and group work activities. This program is funded under the Department of Social Services Family Mental Health Support Strategy.

Confidence in achieving goals

Confidence in achieving goals differed between young males and females. A higher proportion of males than females reported feeling *extremely confident* or *very confident* in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after finishing school (55.2% compared with 44.3%). This is despite the reality of high levels of educational achievement among young females in Australia.

Optimism about career prospects accelerates a young person's trajectory into work by 2 months.³⁹

Confidence-building for females is therefore extremely important in ensuring they can see they are able to achieve their goals. We need to ease the pressure of this transition period and provide tailored support where necessary. Careers advice and planning also needs to begin early, be future-focussed, and challenge gender stereotypes.

Housing

Stable housing provides a platform for physical and mental health and wellbeing for young people. However, some young people are at risk of housing stress or homelessness as they transition out of home. The *Youth Survey 2018* revealed that both females and males are aware of housing concerns, rating *housing costs* (e.g. rent, utilities), *financial stability* and *availability of housing* as the top three barriers to moving out of home.

While housing and financial issues affect both genders, a higher proportion of females than males showed a sense of concern over barriers to moving out of home in the future: 76.5% of females and 62.9% of males reported *housing costs* (e.g. rent, utilities) and 68.6% of females



³⁹ Foundation for Young Australians 2018

Housing (cont.)

and 56.1% of males reported *financial stability* as barriers to moving out of home.

Although *homelessness/housing* ranked ninth on the list of the most important issues affecting Australia today, slightly more females than males identified *homelessness/housing* as an important issue (9.8% compared to 8.6%).

Family and societal pressures differ for young females and males; females frequently have more caring responsibilities and face more career barriers. This contributes to the ongoing gender pay gap in Australia where men working full-time earn \$25,717 on average a year more than women working full-time.⁴⁰

We also know that a lack of economic security can increase the risk of homelessness for females across the lifecycle.⁴¹ More can be done to increase pay equity and women's economic security starting from a young age, which will decrease their risk of homelessness.

Young people in Australia face a largely unaffordable housing market. In 2018, less than 0.01% of rental properties surveyed by Anglicare Australia were affordable and appropriate for single people on Youth Allowance.⁴² Financial stability concerns may also be linked to the low payment rates of Youth Allowance. According to the *Poverty in Australia* 2018 report, 64% of those on Youth Allowance are living below the poverty line.⁴³

An increase in Youth Allowance and rent assistance payments, as well as investment in appropriate and affordable housing for young people is required.

This includes more social and affordable housing as well as investment in youth-specific supported accommodation models. This is particularly important for those young people who do not have the financial support of their families or need to live independently to pursue work or study.

Twice the proportion of females also reported *security/safety* as a potential barrier to moving out of home in the future compared to males (28.3% compared with 14.2%). This striking difference warrants further attention and issues of public safety are discussed further below. This barrier may also relate to a sense of security/safety within the home.

"I find myself homeless due to escaping domestic violence yet I am only entitled to the rights of an average 16 year old. I've found a lot of government support but I'm still struggling to make ends meet."

(F, 16, NSW)

⁴⁰ Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2018

⁴¹ Mission Australia 2017b

⁴² Youth Action and Western Sydney Regional Information and Research Service (WESTIR) 2018

⁴³ Davidson et al. 2018

Housing (cont.)

Females are more likely to experience domestic and family violence than males,⁴⁴ which affects their housing situation and increases their risk of homelessness.

In Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2018*, 10.9% of young people were personally concerned about domestic and family violence, with a slightly higher proportion of females than males indicating this was a personal concern (10.9% compared with 8.2%). More females also indicated *family conflict* was a personal concern (21.6% compared with 11.6% of males).

Intervening early in the life-course to respond to domestic and family violence among young people can prevent ongoing cycles of domestic and family violence into adulthood.

Providing violence prevention education in adolescence when an understanding of relationships is being developed is therefore an important measure to break the cycle of violence and has strong prospects of success.

"Ways that people can anonymously report domestic violence and abuse, and anonymous safe places for children/teenagers to go when needed."

(F, 16, NSW)

"People need to be encouraged to step up and do something if they witness domestic violence or suspect it is happening. Right now some people, especially teens, are not receiving enough education on what to do if they witness domestic violence."

(M, 15, QLD)

LOVE BiTES in Western NSW

Each year, Mission Australia joins interagency partners to deliver the LOVE BiTES Respectful Relationships Education Program to all Year 10 students in Broken Hill.

From 2018, services involved in the delivery of Year 10 LOVE BiTES also worked together to deliver LOVE BiTES Junior, which was rolled out to Year 8 students. The need for earlier intervention was identified as services and schools witnessed an increase in risk-taking behaviour and unhealthy relationships in the younger cohort of adolescents.

⁴⁴ OurWatch 2018

Safety and Trust

Young people need safe communities and public spaces to thrive, however females' perceptions of safety were significantly different to males.

Almost half of the females surveyed *felt unsafe* or *very unsafe walking home after dark* (46.6%), compared to fewer than one fifth of males (18.1%). Males conversely demonstrated more comfort and trust than females in using public spaces: a higher proportion of males reported they feel *comfortable* or *very comfortable* (71.2% compared with 63.1% of females) and *strongly agree* or *agree* that they can trust people in their local area (42.1% compared with 35.0% of females).

Empower Youth

The Southern Melbourne Empower Youth Partnership creates a 'Community of Support' – an environment where young people and youth workers come together via a pro-social drop-in space to engage with peers and positive role models; make connections with services and resources; and develop aspirational plans for community participation.

This 'Community of Support' enables disengaged young people to grow and develop in constructive ways and create pro-social pathways for young people to invest in a competent identity as a valuable social contributor.

In a survey of Australian young women aged 15-19 commissioned by Plan International and Our Watch, 30% of respondents agreed with the statement that 'girls should not be out in public places after dark.'⁴⁵ There is much work to be done to ensure young females both feel safe and are safe in their communities.

Collaboration between individuals, community organisations and governments within shared public spaces is also an important way of creating safer communities and improving outcomes for females.⁴⁶ Collaborative community strengthening approaches should be co-designed with intended recipients to ensure they meet the needs of young people from all gender identities.

"The government needs to acknowledge that there is a problem with our society that people walk down the street and don't feel safe."
(F, 17, TAS)

"Make the streets safer, I don't want to be scared when I walk at night with friends. Or even during the day."

(F, 16, QLD)

⁴⁵ Plan International Australia 2016

⁴⁶ Moore et al. 2014; Mission Australia 2017c

Participation and inclusion

Positively, both females and males showed evidence of participation in a range of activities, which are beneficial to developing social networks and interpersonal skills.

The most noted activities differed between females and males. Higher proportions of males than females were involved in *sports as a participant* (68.2% compared with 60.1%) and *sports as a spectator* (47.1% compared with 36.0%). Conversely, a greater proportion of female than male respondents were involved in *arts/cultural/music activities* (42.0% compared with 29.0%) and *volunteer work* (41.2% compared with 31.4%).

Although these differences may be due to personal preference, efforts must be made to reduce all gendered barriers to participation.

Programs encouraging gender equity should be implemented, such as those supporting females to participate in sport.

Promising examples include ‘girls make your move’⁴⁷ and the ‘Watch Me Play’ and ‘Watch Me Grow’ campaigns.⁴⁸ Improving participation in physical activity can also have a positive impact on women’s health and their relationship with their bodies.⁴⁹

“I think I need to focus on myself and get myself to a point where I am happy with how I look—whether that be playing more sports or eating healthier.”

(F, 16, SA)



⁴⁷ Australian Government Department of Health 2017

⁴⁸ Cricket Australia 2018; Cricket Victoria 2018

⁴⁹ Australian Institute of Family Studies 2018

Recommendations

- **Young people need improved access to evidence-based and gender-sensitive mental health prevention** and intervention programs through schools and community services.
- **Broader social pressures need to be combatted** that result in higher levels of concern about coping with stress and body image among young females.
- Parents, teachers, schools, and community organisations need to be supported and resourced **to better understand and be responsive to the challenges faced by young females.**
- An increase in Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance payments, as well as increased investment in appropriate and affordable housing for young people is required **to ensure young people have access to a safe home.**
- **Respectful relationship and violence prevention education should be universally provided** to prevent ongoing cycles of domestic and family violence.
- Place-based approaches should be prioritised and **co-designed to improve feelings of community safety for young people**, particularly for young females.
- **Young people's participation in a broad range of activities should be supported** and barriers to participation overcome, including barriers to female participation in sport.

Appendix 1

State and territory distribution: 2018

A total of 28,286 young people aged 15 to 19 years responded to Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2018*. Respondents came from across Australia and Appendix Table 1 below indicates the number and percentage of respondents from each Australian state/territory. There were 17 respondents who did not indicate which state/territory they lived in.

Appendix Table 1: Number/percentage of respondents by State/Territory, 2018

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents %
ACT	336	1.2
NSW	8,211	29.0
NT	154	0.5
QLD	5,769	20.4
SA	3,767	13.3
TAS	1,715	6.1
VIC	5,132	18.1
WA	3,202	11.3

Gender breakdown

Over half (55.0%) of respondents to the *Youth Survey 2018* were female and 41.7% were male. There were 1.6% respondents who provided the response 'other' and 1.7% respondents who did not give a response.

Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

A total of 1,594 (5.7%) respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Of this total, 1,277 (4.6%) respondents identified as Aboriginal, while 173 (0.6%) identified as Torres Strait Islander (the remaining 0.5% identified as both). A slightly higher proportion of male than female respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (6.3% compared with 4.5%).

Language background other than English

A total of 4,107 (15.0%) respondents stated that they were born overseas and 5,292 (19.4%) young people reported speaking a language other than English at home. Of the more than 100 languages other than English spoken at home, the most common were (in order of frequency): Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino/Tagalog and Italian.

Disability

A total of 1,623 (6.0%) respondents indicated that they were living with a disability, with a greater proportion of males (6.8%) than females (3.9%) reporting a disability. The most frequently cited disabilities were (in order of frequency): autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, physical disabilities and anxiety disorder.

Appendix 2

State and territory distribution: 2017

A total of 24,055 young people aged 15 to 19 years responded to Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2017*. Respondents came from across Australia and Figure 1.1 indicates the number and percentages from each state/territory.

Appendix Table 2: Number/percentage of respondents by State/Territory 2017

	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents %
ACT	745	3.1%
NSW	7,208	30.0%
NT	275	1.1%
QLD	4,589	19.1%
SA	2,537	10.6%
TAS	1,322	5.5%
VIC	4,783	19.9%
WA	2,579	10.7%

Gender breakdown

Over half (57.5%) of respondents were female and 39.6% were male. There were 1.5% respondents who provided the response other and 1.4% respondents who did not make a response.

Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

A total of 1,265 (5.3%) respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Of this total, 1,082 (4.6%) respondents identified as Aboriginal, while 105 (0.4%) identified as Torres Strait Islander (the remaining 0.3% identified as both). A slightly higher proportion of male than female respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (6.3% compared with 4.0%).

Language background other than English

A total of 3,596 (15.1%) respondents stated that they were born overseas and 4,344 (18.3%) young people reported speaking a language other than English at home. Of the more than 90 languages other than English spoken at home, the most common were (in order of frequency): Chinese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Filipino/Tagalog and Cantonese.

Disability

A total of 1,117 (4.8%) respondents indicated that they were living with a disability, with a slightly greater proportion of males (5.6%) than females (3.3%) reporting a disability. The most frequently cited disabilities in 2017 were (in order of frequency): autism, learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), physical disabilities and deafness or hearing impairments.

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