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HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Exploring the SpeakNow Youth Survey

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KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

This report presents information on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of young South Australians through data collected in the *SpeakNow Youth Survey 2010*. The survey was published in *The Advertiser* and supported by the South Australian Office for Youth.

The results referenced in this survey (unless otherwise stated) were collected from the Advertiser's **2010 *SpeakNow Youth Survey*** supported by the South Australian Office for Youth.

The key findings are as follows:

Health

- Half of young South Australians (aged 12 to 25 years) felt a healthy diet was important, with this more common in young females and those aged 20 to 25 years.
- One quarter of young people exercised daily, with this more common for males and the younger age groups.
- Over half of all young South Australians were concerned about their body shape. This was more common in females, and increased with age.
- Body image affected self confidence and choice of clothing for a third of young people, with this again more common for females and older age groups.
- Two thirds of young South Australians had experienced stress in the past 12 months, one third had experienced anxiety and more than a quarter experienced depression. Diagnosis of a mental illness was considerably lower, with only 6% prevalence.
- Around half of young South Australians had felt peer pressure to engage in risky behaviours, including one quarter who had experienced peer pressure to drink alcohol. Peer pressure for engaging in unsafe driving, smoking marijuana or other drugs was twice as common for young males.

Wellbeing

- Three quarters of young South Australians were positive about their future. However, unemployed youth were less likely to be positive.
- Relationship issues such as fighting with family and friends was a significant worry for younger people aged between 12 and 15 years). Having enough money caused a lot of concern to the oldest group (20 to 25 years).
- Job opportunities concerned young people of all ages with this issue increasingly important in older age groups. One third of youth aged under 20 years were concerned about completing year 12.
- Young people felt they did not have enough time for family/relaxation, hobbies and personal interests, friends and relaxation.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents information on the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of young South Australians aged 12 to 25 years who responded to the 2010 *SpeakNow Youth Survey*. The focus of this report is on the information relating to those young people's health and wellbeing (*the results referenced in this survey (unless otherwise stated, relate to the responses provided by those young people participating in this survey)*).

In 2011, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released a report exploring the health and wellbeing of young Australians aged between 12 and 24 years (*Young Australians: their Health and Wellbeing 2011*). The majority (93%) of young Australians rated their health as excellent, very good or good. However, 9% of young Australians in the 16 to 24 year age group had high levels of psychological distress, a symptom twice as likely in females. About one quarter of young Australians (aged 16 to 24 years) had at least one mental disorder, with anxiety, substance use disorders and depression leading causes. In addition, many young people were engaging in risky behaviours that put pressure on their health in other ways. For instance, the report found that 11% of young people were daily smokers, 30% drank alcohol at risky level for short-term harm and 12% at a risky level for long term harm and 19% had experimented with illicit drugs.

The AIHW report also explored health behaviours including overweight and obesity, physical exercise, and nutrition. In 2007-8, 35% of young people were overweight or obese. Adolescents (12 to 17 years) were at a lower risk of being overweight or obese (31%) than adults aged 18 to 24 years where 37% were overweight or obese. The report also explored whether young Australians were meeting the national guidelines for physical activity and daily intakes of fruit and vegetables. Australian guidelines recommend 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day of the week for children (5 to 17 years) and 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most days of the week for people aged 18 years and over. The AIHW found that a quarter of young people aged 15 to 24 years meet these guidelines. Young adults aged 18 to 24 years were more likely to meet the guidelines than adolescence but this may reflect the lower requirements in the older age group. Almost one third (29%) of young adults aged 18 to 24 years were sedentary (no exercise or very low levels of exercise) compared to 23% of adolescents (15 to 17 years)

As for nutrition, a small fraction (5%) of young people aged 12 to 24 years met the daily recommended serves of both fruit and vegetable intakes. About one-third (32%) met the recommendations for daily intake of fruit and 11% met the recommendation for daily intake of vegetables. Young people who met the daily nutritional requirements were more likely to engage in moderate or high levels of exercise than those who did not meet the guidelines.

In the subsequent sections, we present information on the health and wellbeing of young South Australians collected in the *SpeakNow Youth Survey 2010*. The 2010 *SpeakNow Youth Survey* was published in the EducationNow section of The Advertiser and online through the AdelaideNow website, Office for Youth website and Facebook pages. In total, the survey was completed by 2,661 young South Australians aged 12 to 25 years of age. Data was weighted to be representative of the population of South Australian young people by age, gender and region (metro vs. country). The survey is a partnership between the Office for Youth (Government of South Australia) and The Advertiser.

2 HEALTH

2.1 DIET

A healthy diet was important to around half of all young South Australians. However, 41% only thought about a healthy diet sometimes, while 10% stated that it was not important and they ate whatever they liked. Young females tended to be more focused on a healthy diet than young males with 56% of females stating it was very important to them compared to 43% of males. Young people living in metropolitan areas were more likely to state that a healthy diet was important compared to those living in the country (52% vs. 42%). Younger people (aged 12 to 19 years) were less concerned about a healthy diet than those aged 20 to 25 years (44% vs. 56%). There were also marked differences between people who were employed, students or unemployed. Forty-eight percent of students felt a healthy diet was important and 52% of the young employed agreed. However, only 34% of the young unemployed considered a healthy diet important. At the other end of the scale, only 8% of employed youth and 11% of young students stated that a healthy diet was *not* important compared with 23% of young unemployed who said they 'eat what they like'.

2.2 EXERCISE

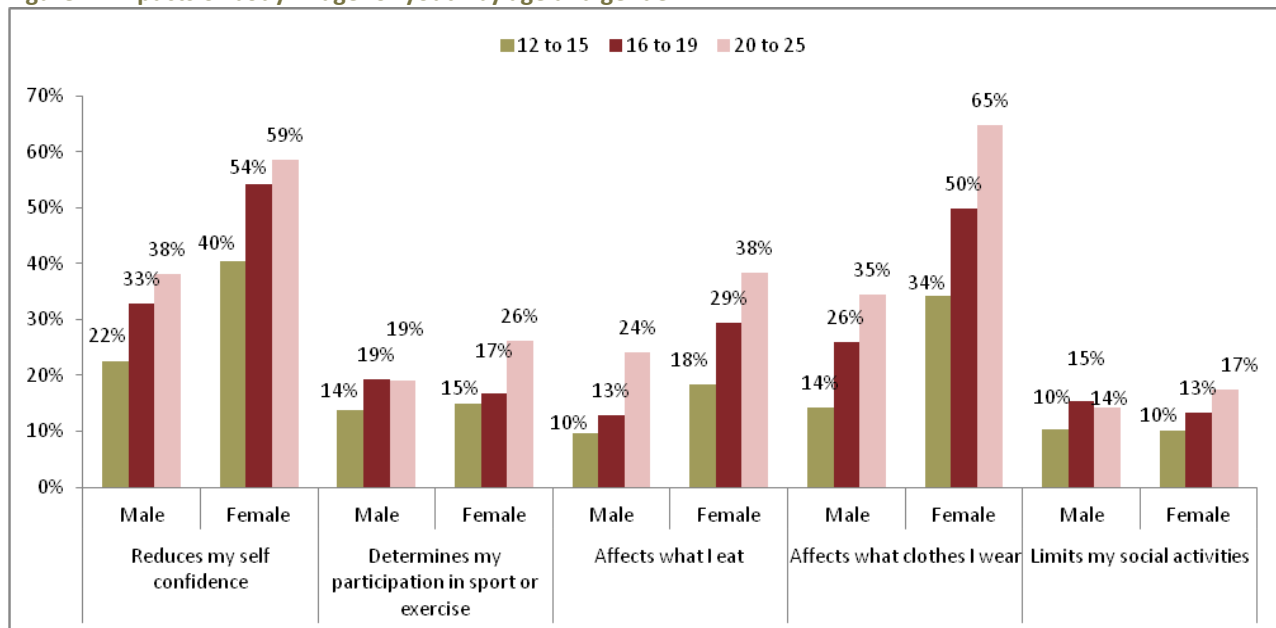
Young people living in South Australia reported exercising or playing sport regularly with only 16% stating that they exercised less than once a week or never. This is considerably better than the national figures presented in the AIHW report where 29% of 18 to 24 year olds and 23% of 15 to 17 years old reported minimal or no weekly exercise. One quarter (24%) of young people exercised daily, 46% exercised a few times a week and 13% exercised at least once a week. Males were more likely than females to report exercising daily (29% vs. 19%), correspondingly females were more likely than males to exercise a few times a week (52% vs. 41%). However, the time spent exercising dropped off as people grew older. Almost all (92%) of those aged 12 to 15 years exercised regularly (at least once a week) compared to 81% of people aged 16 to 25 years.

2.3 BODY IMAGE

Over half of all young South Australians (56%) were concerned about their body shape. This was more common in females (68%) than males (45%), and increased with age. Forty percent of 12 to 15 year olds were concerned with their body image, compared to 54% of 16 to 19 year olds and 67% of 20 to 25 year olds. The gender differential is even more marked when considering that less than a third (32%) of young males (aged 12 to 15 years) were concerned about body shape, however, over three-quarters (78%) of older females (aged 20 to 25 years) expressed concern.

Figure 1 shows the impact of body image on young people's beliefs and behaviour. Body image has the largest effects on self-confidence and choice of clothing with a third of young people stating that their body image impacted these areas. In almost all cases, body image affected females more than males and, as previously indicated became more significant with older age. For example, the older cohort of females (aged 20 to 25 years) were three times more likely than young males (aged 12 to 15 years) to have their self-esteem affected by body image. About 20% of young people suggested that their body image affected what they ate and 17% suggested it determined their participation in sport or exercise. A small proportion of young people felt that their body image limited their social activities.

Figure 1: Impacts of body image for youth by age and gender



Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options.

2.4 MENTAL HEALTH

In the past 12 months, the prevalence of mental health symptoms in young South Australians was high. Two thirds experienced stress, one third had experienced anxiety and 28% experienced depression during this period. Symptomatically, 40% had experienced low self-esteem and 39% felt lost or confused. However, only 6% of youth had been diagnosed with a mental illness. Whilst acknowledging there is a difference between clinical diagnosis and self-report, the high levels of self-reported anxiety and depression are of concern.

Stress, depression, low self-esteem and anxiety were reported more in people aged 16 to 25 years than those aged 12 to 15 years. For example, more than three-quarters (77%) of people aged 20 to 25 years reported feeling stressed compared with 72% aged 16 to 19 years and less than half (47%) of people under the age of 16. A higher proportion of females compared with males reported stress (72% vs. 63%), depression (32% vs. 26%), low self-esteem (49% vs. 32%) and anxiety (40% vs. 28%). There were minimal differences between young people living in metropolitan compared with country areas. However, young people who were unemployed had higher levels of anxiety (50%) than those who were employed (34%) or studying (35%). Unemployed youth were also much more likely to have been diagnosed with a mental illness (17%) than students (8%) or employed youth (6%). The relationship between mental illness and employment is bi-directional – in that unemployment may exacerbate mental illness, and the presence of mental illness impacts on employment prospects.

2.5 PEER PRESSURE

Just over half (53%) of young South Australians have *not* felt peer pressure to undertake risky behaviours such as drinking alcohol and unsafe driving. However, the remaining 47% have felt some pressure to engage in one or more risky behaviours - 28% have felt peer pressure to drink alcohol, 13% to smoke cigarettes, 11% to engage in unsafe driving, 10% to smoke marijuana and 7% to take other illicit drugs.

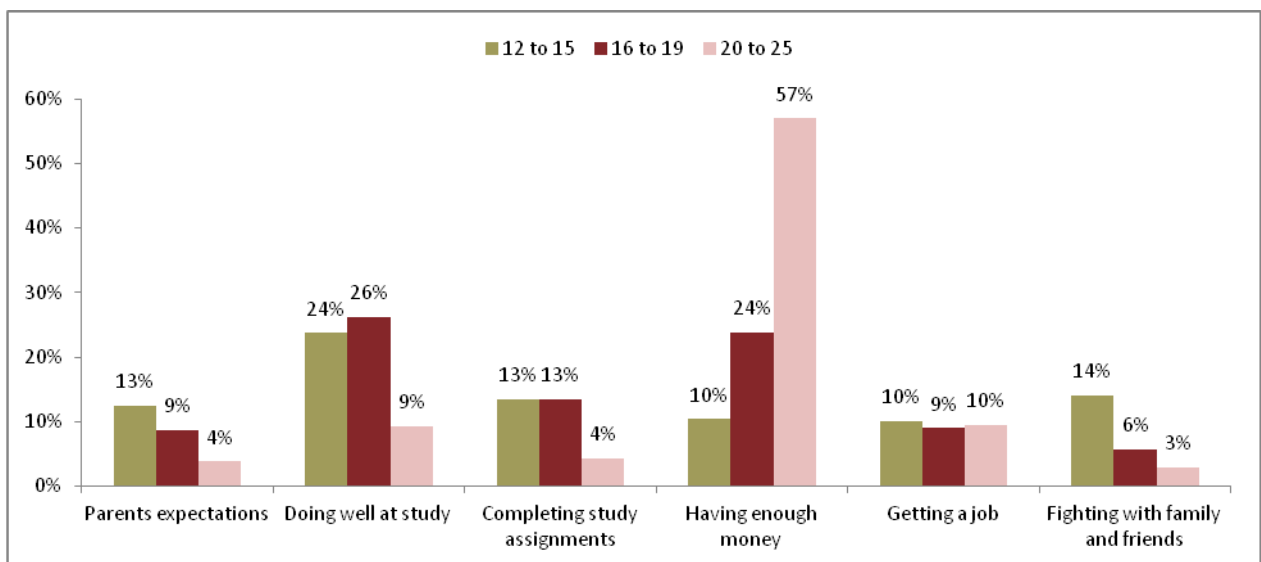
There were clear gender differences with almost twice as many males as females experiencing peer pressure to engage in unsafe driving (14% vs. 7%), smoke marijuana (12% vs. 7%) or take other illicit drugs (9% vs. 5%). Peer pressure to drink alcohol was also higher amongst young males but was still experienced by one quarter of females (30% vs. 25%). For some risky behaviours (e.g. unsafe driving and smoking cigarettes) peer pressure was low in young people aged 12 to 15, peaked between 16 and 19 years, and then dropped off for young people in their 20s. However, peer pressure to drink alcohol and take illicit drugs including marijuana remained high for young adults aged 20 to 25 years.

3 WELLBEING

Three quarters of young South Australians (74%) were positive about their future - a finding that did *not* differ by age or gender. However, fewer young people living in the country were positive about their future (70%) than those living in metro areas (76%). Young people who were studying or employed were generally positive about their future (74% and 77%, respectively) but fewer unemployed young people were positive about their future (57%).

Figure 2 shows the factors that caused young people the most worry as a function of age. Relationship issues such as fighting with family and friends was a significant worry for younger people (12 to 15 years) but was less important in the older cohorts as other issues took primacy. Having enough money caused a lot of concern to the oldest group (20 to 25 years) with more than half (57%) indicating this was their biggest worry. It was also evident as a major worry for a quarter (24%) of 16 to 19 year olds. Not surprisingly, performing well at school, completing study assignments and meeting parents expectations were the most significant worries for around half of the people aged 12 to 19 years.

Figure 2: Highest cause of worries for youth by age group

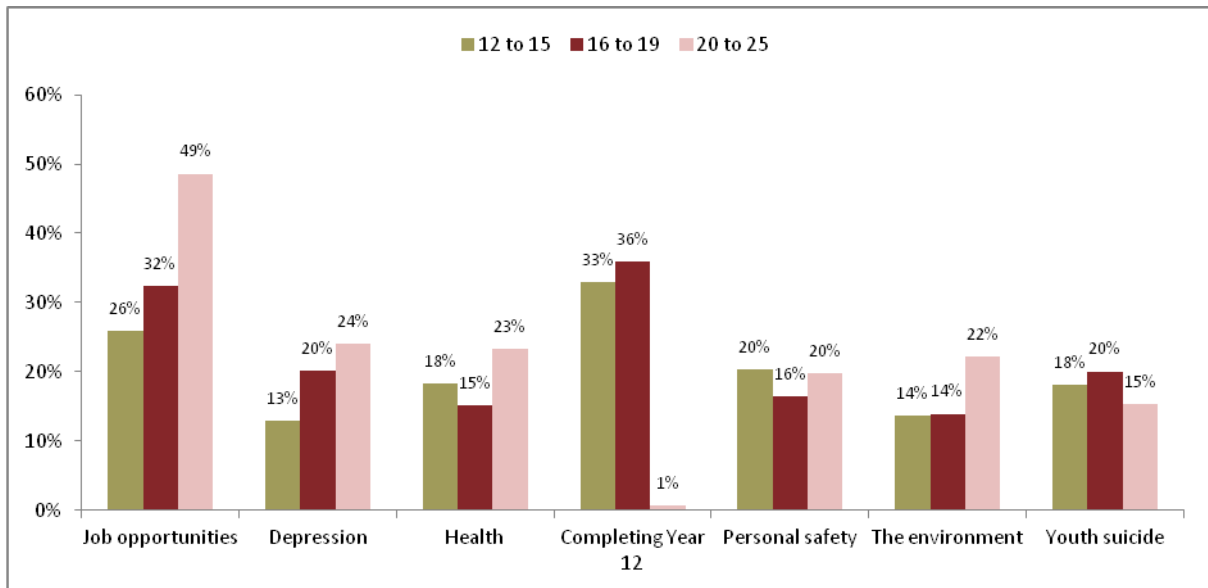


Note. Three of the options (having a boyfriend/girlfriend, being accepted by friends, and having someone to discuss problems with) were reported by less than 5% of youth so were omitted from this figure.

Young South Australians also reported on broader social issues that caused them concern such as racism, aboriginal reconciliation, crime, poverty and the environment, with key results presented in Figure 3. Interestingly, the results were consistent with the personal worries presented in Figure 2. One third of youth aged under 20 years were concerned about completing year 12. Job opportunities concerned young people of all ages and this issue was increasingly important in older age groups. A half of those aged 20 years and over

were concerned about this. Health and personal safety were amongst the most concerning issues for young people. Mental health issues were also important with a slight drop in concern about youth suicide in older groups but a corresponding increase in concern around depression.

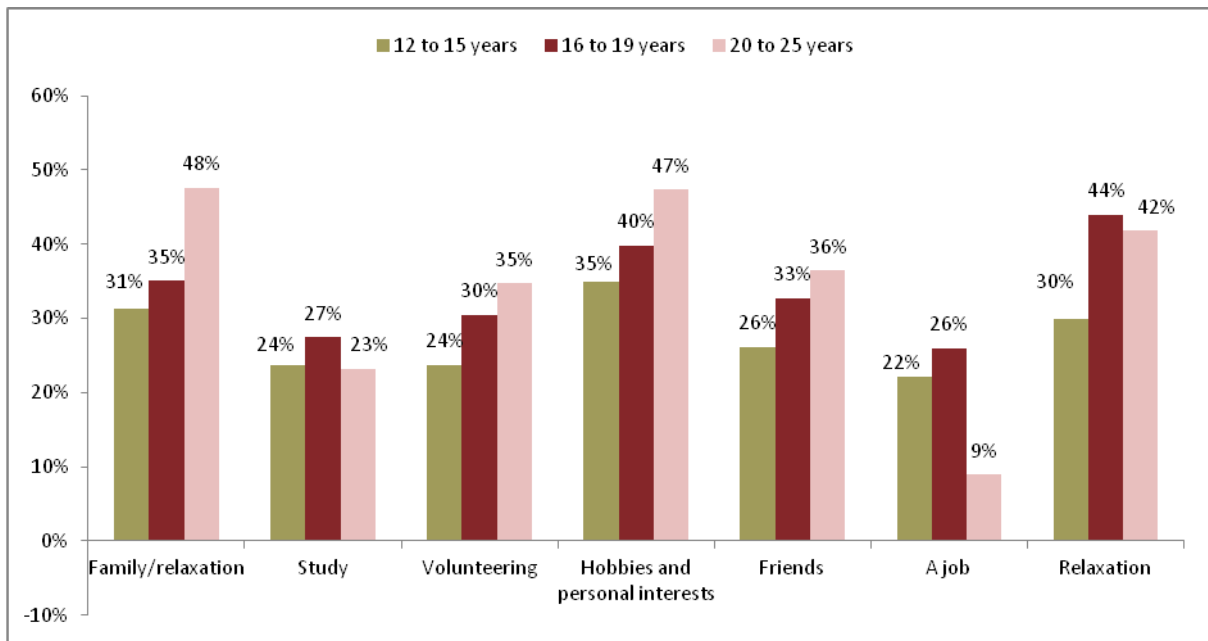
Figure 3: Issues that most concern youth by age



Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options.

Young people felt they did not have enough time for family/relaxation, hobbies and personal interests, friends and relaxation (see Figure 4). Given the importance of personal relationships to happiness and wellbeing, it is concerning that around 40% of young people felt they did not have time for family/relaxation and one-third did not have enough time for their friends. Time pressures increased with age with almost half of all young adults aged 20 to 25 years not having enough time for family/relaxation compared to about a third of younger adults.

Figure 4: Important things in life that young people do not have time for



Note. Totals will not sum to 100% as respondents selected multiple options.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This report explores the beliefs and attitudes of young South Australian's aged 12 to 25 years about health and wellbeing. Many young South Australians had experienced stress in the past 12 months, one third had experienced anxiety and more than a quarter experienced depression. Around half of young South Australians had felt peer pressure to engage in risky behaviours, including one quarter who had experienced peer pressure to drink alcohol. Peer pressure for engaging in unsafe driving, smoking marijuana or other drugs was twice as common for young males. On a more positive note, about one quarter of young people exercised daily, about half felt a healthy diet was important and three quarters were positive about their future. Unemployed youth were less likely to be positive about their future and job opportunities concerned young people of all ages with this issue increasingly important in older age groups. These findings suggested that although many young South Australians experience stress, anxiety, peer pressure and concerns about future job opportunities, they remain conscious of the importance of healthy lifestyle choices and are for the most part positive about the future.