

REAL LIFE AS A WA KID

Sexting, safety, self-confidence & how they regularly talk to strangers online

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Nearly half of all WA high school students regularly talk to strangers online.

And close to one-third of primary school students — some as young as nine — sometimes use the internet to talk to people they have never met in person.

A survey of more than 16,500 WA schoolchildren — the biggest of its kind — found 45 per cent of high school students were in regular contact online with people they had not met, while 30 per cent of primary school children were doing the same at least once a month.

It also revealed a spike in children being sent unwanted sexual material.

The survey of Year 4 to 12 students was done by the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Colin Pettit, who said, while the results found most young West Australians were mentally and physically healthy, there were causes for concern.

“There is clear evidence that mental health remains a critical issue for young people, and the gender wellbeing gap continues, with female students rating their wellbeing less favourably than their male peers,” he said.

PHONES

Many young people said they felt bothered without access to their phone and the older they were, the worse it was.

More than one-third of Year 7 to 12 students were often bothered when they could not use their phone and more than one-in-five high school girls went without food or sleep because of their phone.

SEXTING

More young people are getting sent unwanted sexual material.

Over half (56 per cent) of female students said they had received sexual material, including pornographic images, videos or messages, up from 54 per cent two years ago. The proportion for boys was up from 27 per cent to 30 per cent.

READING

Young people might be playing more computer games but they're also reading more, with the proportion of students saying they read a book for leisure every day or almost every day

— up since 2019's survey, rising from 51 per cent to 56 per cent in 2021.

HOMEWORK/EXAMS

Schoolchildren are spending more time on homework than two years ago and the younger they are the more likely they are to do regular homework. More than half of Year 4 to Year 6 students (55 per cent) said they did homework every day or almost every day, up from 43.8 per cent. By comparison 46 per cent of high school students said the same, up from 35 per cent.

WELLBEING

Older students tended to be less positive, with younger students more likely to rate their life satisfaction higher and finding it easier to talk to their parents. Among high school students 13 per cent said they could not talk to their parents about their problems. One quarter of girls in high school reported poor life satisfaction.

BODY IMAGE

Nearly one-third of female high school students (30 per cent) said they were overweight, while over half (53 per cent) said they were "around the right weight".

Older students and girls were more likely to worry about their weight, with 28 per cent of high school girls worrying "a lot" compared with 8 per cent of boys.

SAFETY

Girls as young as 14 "expected" to feel unsafe when out — at least according to one respondent, who said: "I'm a girl, and I'm teenager, so I guess it's kind of expected now for me to feel a little unsafe when I'm out."

Most students (65 per cent) felt safe at home all the time. Just 3 per cent never or rarely felt safe at home. Nearly half of Year 9 to Year 12 students have been hit or physically harmed on purpose, with the numbers higher for boys (52 per cent) than girls (36 per cent).

BULLYING

More than one-third (36 per cent) of all those surveyed said they had been bullied, cyber-bullied or both. The proportion of children who had been bullied was largely the same in primary or high school but older students were more likely to have been cyber-bullied.

COVID-19

The pandemic appears to have left most young people unscathed, with the majority saying it had affected them only "a little" or "not at all".

One-third admitted feeling anxious or stressed about it.