

Young Aboriginal Researchers in Community (YARiC)

Report on the YARiC
Wellbeing Survey



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal people's culture and heritage to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this publication, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises Torres Strait Islanders who live in Western Australia. The use of the term 'Aboriginal' in this way is not intended to imply equivalence between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, though similarities do exist.

Content warning

This report explores young people's views on a variety of topics including mental health, feeling unsafe, and sexual harassment and assault. These issues may be distressing for some people. If you would like to speak to someone, options for support include Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800 and Lifeline 13 11 14.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all participating young people, and their families, for their contribution to this project.

Artwork reproduced with permission of Alexandra Slade, YARiC member.

Thanks to Follow the Dream Program, Stars Foundation, John Paul College, Eastern Goldfields College, and Kalgoorlie-Boulder Community High School.

Suggested citation

Commissioner for Children and Young People 2023, *Young Aboriginal Researchers in Community YARiC Wellbeing Survey*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth.

Alternative formats

On request, large print or alternative format copies of this report can be obtained from:

Commissioner for Children and Young People
Level 1, Albert Facey House, 469 Wellington Street Perth 6000

Telephone: (08) 6213 2297

Freecall: 1800 072 444

Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au

ccyp.wa.gov.au



Message from the Commissioner



One of my priorities as Commissioner for Children and Young People is to promote the right of all children and young people to have their voices heard and to participate in decisions that affect them. To do this I work with peer researchers, supporting young people to find out the views of other children and young people in their communities on important matters. My office undertakes projects that consult directly with children and young people, using research and other evidence to advocate for improved policy, services and attitudes.

My office also consults directly with children and young people statewide by conducting the Speaking Out Survey. In 2021, 16,532 students in Years 4 to 12 from across WA had their say about their health and wellbeing. One of the main findings of this survey was that female young people consistently rated their wellbeing below that of their male peers and reported higher rates of stress and lower life satisfaction.

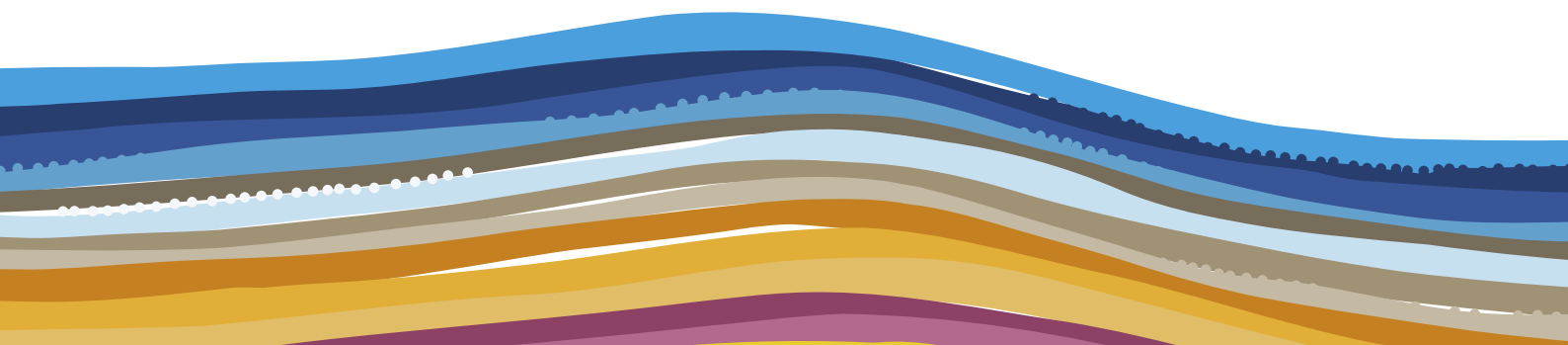
To learn more about girls' wellbeing in a regional area, seven young Aboriginal women in Kalgoorlie were invited to become YARiC peer researchers and they sought the views of 54 young people from their community about wellbeing and gender.

The YARiC project is a positive example of a meaningful participation approach for Aboriginal children and young people as it provides opportunities for those involved to develop research skills and create a culturally safe way to seek the views of other young people on a range of issues.

I am grateful to Polly Farmer Foundation's Follow the Dream Program, John Paul College, Eastern Goldfields College, Kalgoorlie-Boulder Community High School and the Stars Foundation for supporting the YARiC researchers and facilitating peer-consultations within their schools.

Most importantly I would like to thank the peer researchers - seven dedicated young women who demonstrated impressive leadership and passion for their roles throughout all phases of the YARiC project: Nevaeh Reeves, Trishana Garwood, Zaleah Sambo, Marissah Munroe, Jada Evans, Alexandrea Slade and Maliqua Sam.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jacquie J.'.





Project overview

The YARiC project provides culturally safe research training and experience in all aspects of community research for young people including project planning, peer consultation, data analysis and reporting.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People's office has previously partnered with Aboriginal organisations to train young Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and Pilbara as community researchers as a way to gain further insights into the lives of local young people through consultations with peers who share similar experiences and languages.

In 2022, seven young Aboriginal women from three Kalgoorlie high schools formed the YARiC group to learn about ethical community research methodologies and explore topics related to girls' wellbeing.

In July 2022, the YARiC group completed three days of intensive training designed and facilitated by Mandy Downing, Indigenous research ethicist and Dean of Indigenous Futures at Curtin University. Rebecca Fitzgerald, Mentor from Better Heart Aboriginal Corporation, provided support throughout the project.

With guidance from the Commissioner's staff, the YARiC group worked together to develop survey questions and design their own peer-research project, creating an online survey for school students about wellbeing, mental health, connectedness, and gender equity.

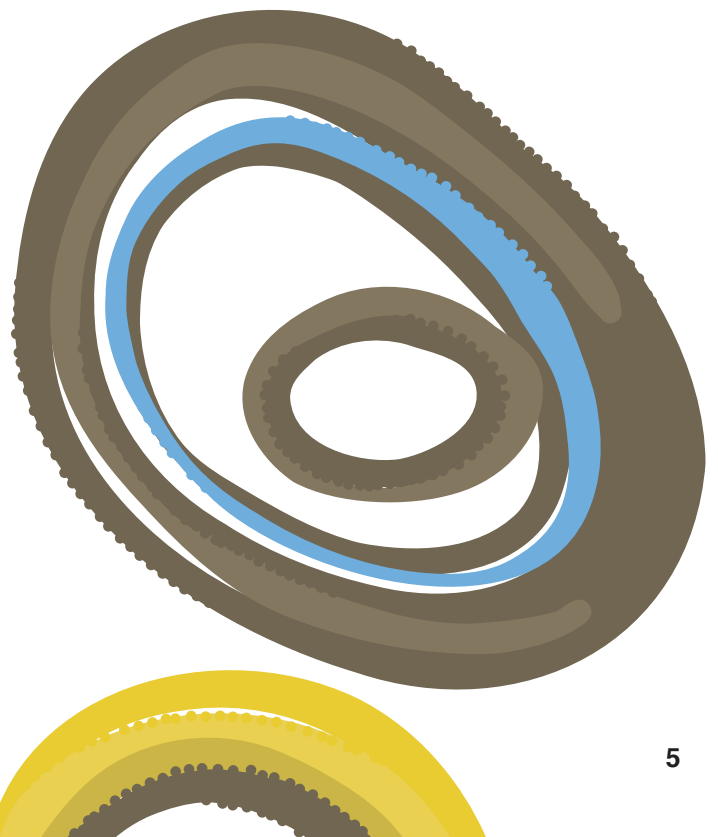
Working in teams in September 2022, the YARiC group recruited 54 participants from their schools, facilitated consultation sessions to explain the purpose of the survey and provided support to complete the YARiC Wellbeing Survey.

The survey results were analysed by the Commissioner's staff to prepare this report with review and feedback provided from the YARiC group.

On 29 November 2022, six members of the YARiC group travelled from Kalgoorlie to Parliament House to present a draft copy of this report to the then-Minister for Youth, the Hon Dave Kelly MLA, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People.

This report is a snapshot of views from a small group of young people in Kalgoorlie.

While this is a local survey, the issues raised are not isolated to Kalgoorlie and express views common to thousands of students from diverse regions and backgrounds who also raise concerns about gender inequality, sexual harassment, stereotyping and unfair social norms. Similarly, participants suggest solutions to cultivate wellbeing such as respectful behaviours education, improving safety and widespread campaigns to promote inclusion, equal opportunities and a wellbeing focus for all children and young people.



Results of the YARiC Wellbeing Survey

Introduction

Fifty-four young people aged between 12 and 18 years from high schools in Kalgoorlie participated in the online YARiC Wellbeing Survey.

While the data in this report is not representative of any particular cohort of young people in Kalgoorlie, it does reflect the views of 54 young people about wellbeing and gender.

The majority of participants identified as female (56%) and 39 per cent identified as male, the remainder identified 'in another way'. Almost two-thirds (63%) identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

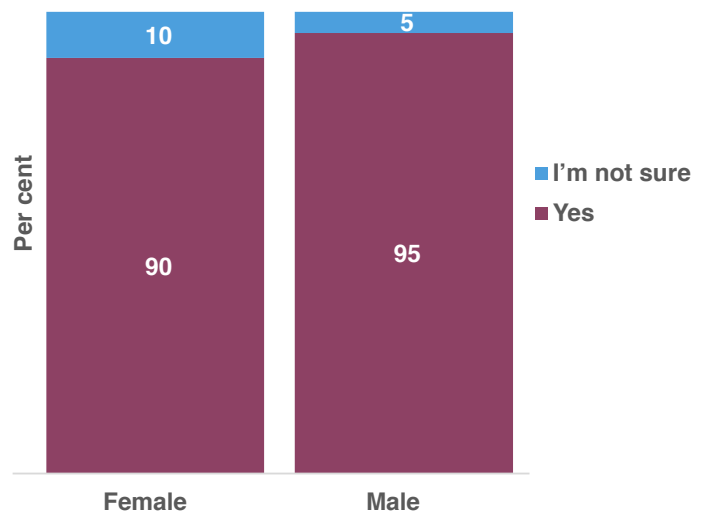
The young people completing the survey responded to several open questions using free text some of which are published in this report as direct quotes. These responses are generally unedited to ensure the voice of the young person is authentically presented. Editing has only been done where necessary for clarity, understanding or for confidentiality, in this instance any changes or omissions have been marked with an [] or an ellipsis (...).

The young people completing the survey were asked a small number of multiple-choice questions.¹

Mental health

Most of the survey participants said they know how to get help for themselves or a friend if they need it (female: 90%, male: 95%). Ten per cent of female participants and five per cent of male participants were not sure they knew how to get help.

Graph 1: Proportion of participants who said they knew how to get help for themselves or a friend if needed



Participants were also asked: what affects your mental health and emotional wellbeing? The three top influences on the mental health of the participants were:

- relationships with family and friends
- bullying and name calling from peers
- stress from school.

¹ The responses from young people who report their gender identity in another way are not included in the graphs due to the low number of responses.

Relationships with family and friends

... when it comes to me emotional wellbeing sometimes I feel happy when I have achieved something, sometimes sad if I fight with my parents or friends, sometimes angry if I have like angry emotions about something.

When with mates I feel happy. When I'm with my dad and grandma I feel happy and like I belong. My mum makes me feel like I don't belong. My puppy dogs make me happy.

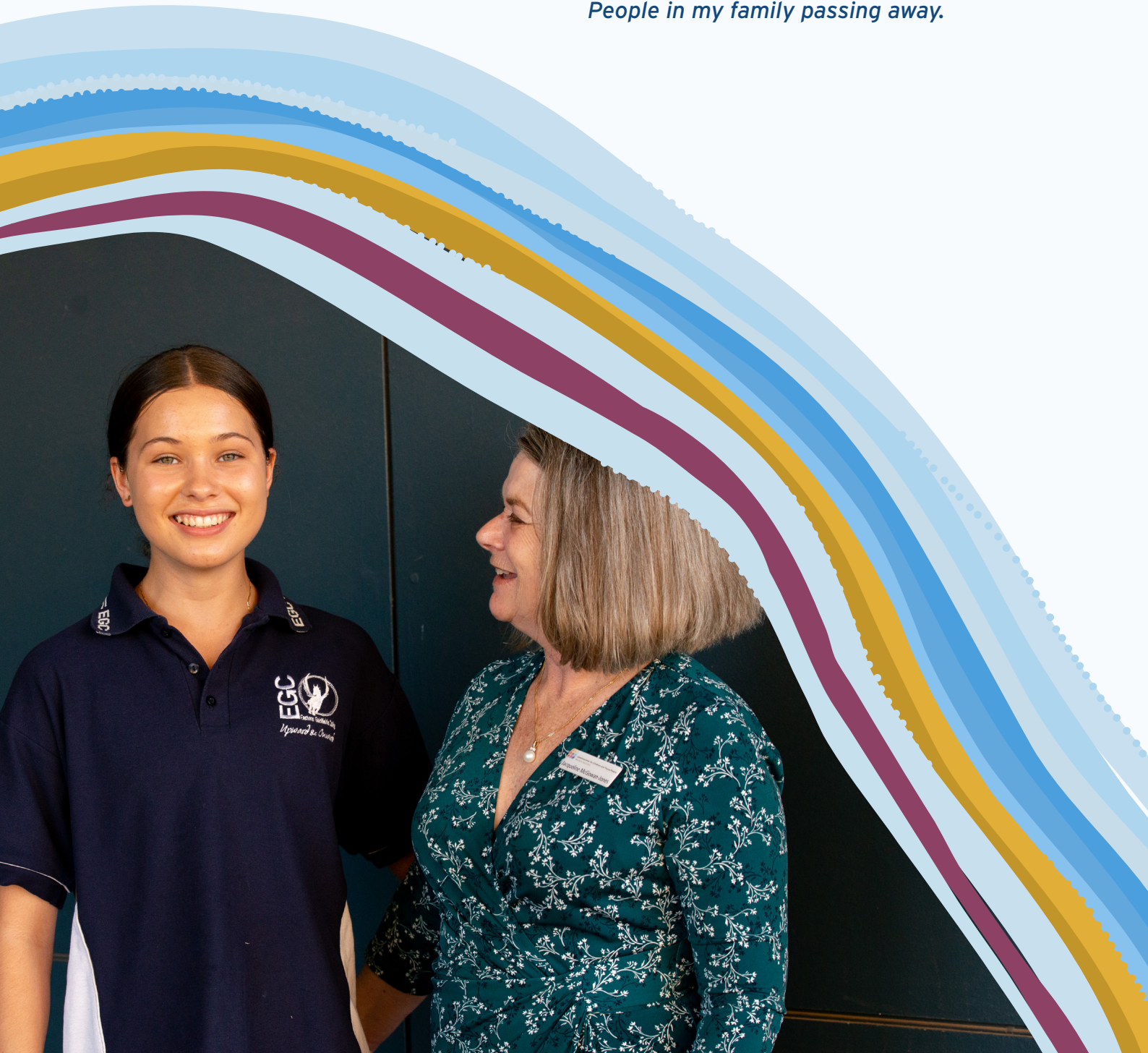
my family relationships make me feel bad - my friendships make me feel good about myself, accepted and like I'm actually doing something right.

my mum helps more than anyone simply because she understands what I'm going through. shes bipolar as well and sympathises with things.

My friends, family and my studies at school.

When people pass away or not so nice comments.

People in my family passing away.



Bullying and name calling

Something that effects my mental health is when people say or call me names it stays in my head for a long amount of time. Sometimes I believe some of the stuff that people say to me and I feel like it is true and I should do something about it but I never know what I should do.

... people are saying rude things about me and I kinder cry myself to sleep.

When people might say something about you or to you that doesn't make you feel good about yourself, or you might look at people who are different to you and you might think they are better or when people are have more of an advantage then you do.

Bullying.

Stress from school

School and emotions it's like you can't really control it one minute you say your fine the next your just sobbing for literally anything you do mental health is always a issue and school can be difficult with everything you get in a week is just why.

The stress of school and life and the transition into adult hood. The pressure to be the best child my parents have raised and the pressure of their expectations.

My current school work load and the way I'm treated by the people around me.

School stress mostly. I also do extracurricular which when combined with the stress of school is even more stressful.

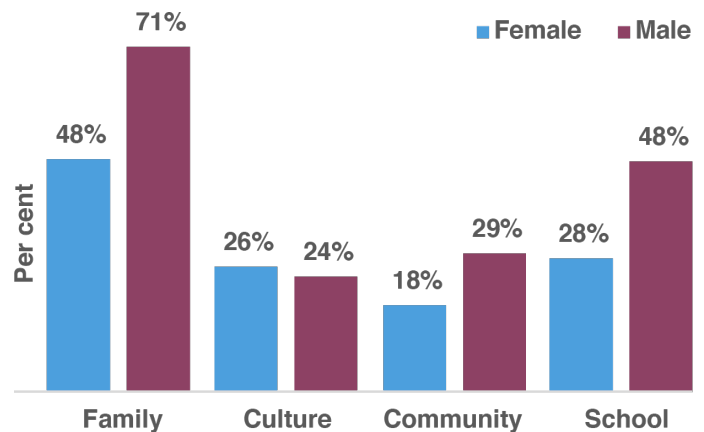
Family make me feel very embraced where as school makes me feel bad about myself and makes me feel that what I am being taught nothing that is going to help me in the future. School teaches you that there is one correct answer and that there is no room for mistakes but in the real world you can have different ways to figure things out and you can have different mistakes and you can have more then one right answer.

Supportive relationships and connectedness

Male young people were more likely to feel very connected to their family, school and community than female survey participants.

Male and female young people had similar responses regarding connectedness to their culture. (Note: Non-Aboriginal students were more likely to report little or no connection to their culture which influences these results).

Graph 2: Proportion of participants saying how connected they feel to their.... [Family, Culture, Community, School]



Participants were asked several open text questions about supportive relationships and connectedness. Responses are grouped into key themes on the following pages.

Feeling supported and connected

Good relationships make me feel happy, loved and warm inside.

The school chaplain she helps me with stuff that has happened at home or at school with my friends and I just really trust her with everything.

I can talk about my problems to me mum or my best friend and teachers and they give me advice and support me in any situation.

With the good relationships it makes me feel like I have someone to open up to and talk to things about. I feel like someone has my back no matter what happens and vice versa.

I can talk to any of my friends about anything and they help many comforting and giving me advice.

My family and friends love me, that's all I need.

My relationships with my friends help strengthen my confidence.

I can talk to my friends at school or one of my teachers who I have previously spoken to before about things. My friends encourage and support me and talking about stuff with them make me feel better. My teacher encouraged me to speak to a professional as well as making me comfortable to speak to her. If she notices somethings wrong then she asks me how I'm doing.

Culture provides connection and support

My family tell me about my culture and teach me about my culture and who's land we are on and my nan and pop tells me cultural story's.

When I know about my family and where I'm from, it makes me feel apart of it and know who I am and I feel proud to be where I'm from. When I don't, I feel like I don't deserve to have the culture and community that I do and that I take it for granted or use it for attention I have people at school who acknowledge me even if they don't really know me.

They make me feel excepted [accepted] and learning about my own culture.

Not getting the support needed

Some students explained that they don't feel supported and feel unable to talk about their feelings.

The teachers don't help me sometimes so I'm lost a lot in class. My family try to help me and I like that.

Not really anywhere... So it's not something I can talk to them about. My mates are not the type to talk and School feels like they don't do anything.

I don't really tell people about how I feel unless I need to because it's a mess to deal with.



Feeling supported and connected

Good relationships make me feel happy, loved and warm inside.

The school chaplain she helps me with stuff that has happened at home or at school with my friends and I just really trust her with everything.

I can talk about my problems to me mum or my best friend and teachers and they give me advice and support me in any situation.

With the good relationships it makes me feel like I have someone to open up to and talk to things about. I feel like someone has my back no matter what happens and vice versa.

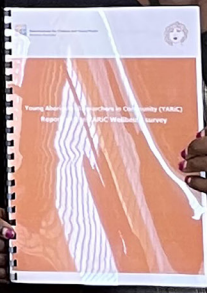
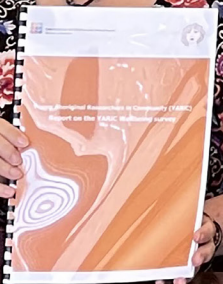
I can talk to any of my friends about anything and they help many comforting and giving me advice.

My family and friends love me, that's all I need.

My relationships with my friends help strengthen my confidence.

I can talk to my friends at school or one of my teachers who I have previously spoken to before about things. My friends encourage and support me and talking about stuff with them make me feel better. My teacher encouraged me to speak to a professional as well as making me comfortable to speak to her. If she notices somethings wrong then she asks me how I'm doing.

YARiC representatives visited Parliament House to present their draft report to members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children.



Gender equality

The female and gender-diverse survey participants were asked questions about gender equality. Only one-quarter of the girls surveyed thought that boys and girls have equal opportunities at their school or anywhere else.

Experiences of gender inequality

Not having enough support or things that only let boys in or play and saying things like a girl can't play a boys sport.

Boy[s] have more opportunities to play sports n stuff.

[Boys] bathrooms are always open. Teachers always let them get away with talking. They get praised for doing basic things like coming to class.

The boys don't have to work as hard and are treated either really wrong or like they are praised. Girl[s] are taken advantage of sometimes and it hurts us. When teachers say 'can I have some strong boys to help lift chairs' like what difference does it make if a girl is strong and able to lift the chairs too.

Because the boy academy has more camps and have more excursions for work and they have more fun and get to go to different places where for the girls academy we get to go on one camp if we are lucky.

The boys academy gets more camps and things to do than the girls academy like excursions and more out of school activities.

Social expectations and stereotypes

Because of gender roles that have been a thing for many generations and women have been told to stay home and watch the kids.

Trade, when it comes into going into trade its easier for guys because they are considered syronger but their are no girls in certain trades.

Yes women can do everything but they have certain things against them. Boys/ men saying 'you belong in the kitchen' is not taking things that girls say seriously.

In certain professions males have a higher chance of being chosen or respected. For example in the mining industry or engineering. Women are not as respected in these areas. Within the army/military cadets girls can also be looked down upon just because they r female ...



Participants were also asked about what they think are the biggest causes of mental health and emotional wellbeing problems for young women.

That they think they're not worth as much as young men and are made to feel inferior. When they try and act otherwise ppl say it's for attention or they're loud or a b___h.

[Body] image and what people say about them behind closed doors and insecurities.

Probably our bodies and getting bullied for it.

Guess being a young girl gotta watch out more.

Their appearance and shape.

What needs to change?

Male behaviour

Creepy men need to go home and lights need to be on everywhere at night.

The way boys are brought up. Sometimes they can be respectful but some spit on us like we are useless and irrelevant.

I have been sexually harassed on the streets just walking to school. it is not a safe place to be. if people had common sense and didn't follow and harass others then it would be safer.

Broader societal change

More community events that promote equal opportunity and wellbeing Talks in schools about wellbeing and issues that affect girls and boys.

I think the biggest cause is men in general. Most girls worry about having a relationship before they worry about themselves

To get treated the same as everyone else.

To get treated just the same as boys or anyone in general.

More awareness of the safe and reliable places for them to go to and the de-stigmatisation of going to these services. Also more points of contact in other parts of the community that can lead to these safe places. Also more training to help.



Conclusion

All children and young people have the right to be safe, to belong, to have their views considered and to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Through this project young people raised their concerns about gender inequality, sexual harassment, stereotyping and unfair social norms. They also made suggestions for improvement including a focus on educating respectful behaviours, safer communities, campaigns promoting equity, inclusion, and wellbeing for all children and young people.

The views of young people expressed in this report strongly reflect findings in the *Girls' wellbeing: Insights from the 2021 Speaking Out Survey* highlighting the need for female rights to be respected. Female young people consistently say that they need to be safe,

taken seriously, treated with respect, feel they belong and to have the same opportunities as their male peers.

The views of young people expressed in this report and the Speaking Out Survey data more broadly are invaluable tools that can drive significant cultural changes in families, schools, and communities across WA.

Participants of the YARiC project gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about the benefits of being involved in the project and highlighted the rewards of connecting with other Aboriginal girls, feeling confident in their abilities, and understanding how community research and individual voices can make positive change.





Views of the participants on being part of the YARiC project

Being a part of the YARiC program was a great opportunity. I learnt so many new things.

This Project really helped me get a better understanding of girl's wellbeing and what is really behind how girls feel.

It was fun learning about research.

I was a bit scared about asking my friends at school to do the survey but once we started I loved it!

My favourite part of being part of the peer research project was getting to know all the girls from different schools and making new friends.

I enjoy being in the YARiC group and talking to other young indigenous girls.

I loved spending time with everyone in the group and can't wait to see them again soon.



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Level 1, Albert Facey House
469 Wellington Street
PERTH WA 6000

Telephone: (08) 6213 2297
Country freecall: 1800 072 444
Email: info@ccyp.wa.gov.au
ccyp.wa.gov.au

Connect with the Commissioner

