

National Youth Survey 2020 finds girls at single-sex schools fared better than the national average during the pandemic

Mission Australia's annual *Youth Survey* examines the issues of concern to young Australians aged 15 to 19. Its most recent survey has revealed favourable outcomes for girls attending single-sex schools during the pandemic year of 2020.

A report combining the data of 2,670 female students attending Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia member schools has demonstrated that girls attending Alliance schools scored better than the national average for girls aged 15 to 19* on key areas of the *2020 Youth Survey* including mental wellbeing, life satisfaction, educational attainment and professional aspirations.

Mental health is one of the top challenges facing young Australians today. Bullying is a serious and commonly-reported issue within Australian schools which can lead to poor mental health outcomes in young people. Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2020* found that bullying was less of a concern for girls attending single-sex schools compared to the national average for girls (9.6% of single-sex girls were extremely or very concerned about bullying vs. 15.1% of all young females).

Similarly, students from girls' schools were less likely than the national female average to be extremely or very concerned about coping with stress, body image, family conflict, social media, personal safety, suicide, LGBTIQ+ issues, drugs and alcohol.

Overall, girls from single-sex schools were also less likely than the average female to report mental health concerns (37.2% vs. 43.3%). Conversely, 61.3% of girls from Alliance schools indicated feeling happy or very happy with their life compared with 54.4% of all female respondents.

Loren Bridge, Executive Officer of the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia said that these results were a testament to the hard work that Australian girls' schools put in during 2020 to bolster support for the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff.

'There is no doubt that keeping the whole school community connected and on track throughout online learning was challenging. Girls' schools were able to leverage their already strong pastoral care programs and technology platforms to respond quickly and flexibly as the situation continued to change throughout the year,' said Ms Bridge.

Single-sex educated girls also exhibited a stronger orientation towards continuing their education after high school compared to the national female average. Mission Australia's *Youth Survey 2020* revealed that a higher proportion of girls attending Alliance member schools have plans to obtain a university degree (88.1% vs. 69.9%). In addition, single-sex educated girls display a stronger motivation to launch their careers and support themselves financially, with 34.6% of girls' school respondents being determined to find a job after high school compared to the national average of 29.8%.

Despite the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey's findings suggest that students who attended girls' schools remained enthusiastic and confident about the opportunities that life after school has to offer them.

Loren Bridge said academic research already demonstrates that girls who attend single-sex schools are better prepared for and dedicated to seeking out the pathways that can put

them on a fast track to professional growth and success.

‘The findings of the Mission Australia survey affirm existing research, revealing that students at girls’ schools are more likely to feel extremely or very confident in their ability to achieve their study or work goals after they finish school, much more so than girls attending co-educational schools’ said Ms Bridge.

‘In addition, academic research on the benefits of an all-girl education shows that girls experience less bullying, make friends more easily, and feel a stronger sense of safety, belonging and connectedness to their school community than their co-ed counterparts.

‘Mission Australia’s 2020 survey also supports these findings with girls at single-sex schools experiencing higher life satisfaction scores and reporting lower levels of mental health concerns,’ she said.

Notes:

*A total of 25,800 young people between the ages of 15 and 19 responded to Mission Australia’s *Youth Survey 2020*, 56.2% (14,500) were female and included girls from single-sex schools and girls from co-educational schools.

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The Alliance of Girls Schools Australasia is a non-profit organisation advocating for the distinctive work of girls’ schools in educating and empowering girls and young women. The Alliance has 190 member schools across six countries and represents over 132,000 female students.