

# Landmark youth mental health survey released

August 7 2015, by Jasmine Raisbeck

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Research conducted by the Telethon Kids Institute in collaboration with the University of Western Australia has found one in seven Australian four to 17 year olds had a mental health disorder, a prevalence that has remained relatively stable since the last survey was conducted in 1998.

However, the survey titled Young Minds Matter found the types of disorders and the gender and age at which young people are most commonly experiencing them has changed.

The study's chief investigator, UWA Associate Professor David Lawrence, said the survey found fewer children and adolescents than 15 years ago now have ADHD and conduct disorder but there has been an

increase in the number of adolescents with [major depressive disorder](#).

"We also discovered that there are substantially higher rates of mental disorder in families already facing other challenges such as unemployment, and family break up, with the highest prevalence of mental disorder found in sole carer families where the carer was not in employment," Associate Professor Lawrence said.

Associate Professor Lawrence also said the high rates of self-harm and suicidal behaviour in [adolescent girls](#) was of particular concern.

"As well as interviewing 6,300 parents and carers across the country, for the first time we also asked 3,000 young people aged 11 to 17 years to complete a questionnaire in private because we recognise that sometimes children do not tell their parents how they are feeling," said Associate Professor Lawrence.

"Through this process, we discovered that adolescent girls in particular were experiencing high levels of distress. For example we found one in five adolescent girls aged between 16 and 17 met diagnostic criteria for major depressive disorder, one in six had self-harmed in the past 12 months and one in 20 had attempted suicide in that time frame."

Joint chief investigator Professor Steve Zubrick from the Telethon Kids Institute said the Australian Government had shown great consideration to the youth of the country by commissioning the report and he hoped the data would help shape service delivery going forward.

"It is really important that we know about the [mental health](#) of our young people because it is such an enabler," Professor Zubrick said. "If young people are mentally healthy, they are more likely to develop healthy relationships, succeed at school and in the work force."

Professor Zubrick said it was reassuring to find more than 50 per cent of [young people](#) with a mental health condition were receiving some kind of help and almost 90 per cent of those with serious disorders were getting help, but there were still areas of unmet need.

"Following the first survey, there was substantial growth in [mental health services](#) designed to meet the needs of children and adolescents such as headspace and the Kids Helpline. I believe this survey will help the Australian Government decide where to allocate funds and resources moving forward."

**More information:** [health.gov.au/internet/main/pu ... mental-pubs-m-child2](http://health.gov.au/internet/main/pu...mental-pubs-m-child2)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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