This fact sheet summarizes information on the suicide behaviours and associated mental health issues of secondary school students in New Zealand, drawn from the wider Youth’07 survey of their health and wellbeing. Youth’07 surveyed 9,107 secondary school students throughout New Zealand in 2007.

The survey results show that while most students attending secondary schools in New Zealand are satisfied with their lives and have good mental health, there are a significant number of students for whom this is not so:

**Self-Harm and Suicide Behaviours**

In the survey, students’ responses indicated that within the previous 12 months:

- 26% of females and 16% of males had deliberately hurt or harmed themselves.
- 19% of females and 9% of males had serious suicidal thoughts.
- 12% of females and 6% of males had made a suicide plan.
- 7% of females and 3% of males had attempted suicide.

There are some differences between students of various ethnic groups, and between students of higher and lower socio-economic status. One major difference, as shown in the results and graph above, is between the sexes: the rates of self-harm and suicide behaviours were much higher among female students than males.

Another group that is particularly vulnerable are students who are attracted to the same sex or both sexes (4% of students). Of these students, 20% reported making a suicide attempt in the previous 12 months which is five times the rate reported by students attracted exclusively to the opposite sex.

It is important to note that some young people may attempt suicide without spending much time thinking about it beforehand: of the students who reported a suicide attempt 22% did not report having serious suicidal thoughts.

A number of factors in the lives and circumstances of young people are associated with higher rates of suicide behaviours. Some of the important ‘risk factors’ which local and international research has shown are associated with increased levels of suicide behaviour include:

**Mental Health Problems**

- 15% of females and 7% of males reported significant symptoms of depression.

There are some differences between students of various ethnic groups, and between students of higher and lower socio-economic status. One major difference, as shown in the results and graph above, is between the sexes: the rates of self-harm and suicide behaviours were much higher among female students than males.

Another group that is particularly vulnerable are students who are attracted to the same sex or both sexes (4% of students). Of these students, 20% reported making a suicide attempt in the previous 12 months which is five times the rate reported by students attracted exclusively to the opposite sex.
**Binge drinking alcohol**

- 36% of male students and 33% of female students reported they had engaged in 1 or more episodes of binge drinking in the previous 4 weeks (5 or more drinks within a 4 hour drinking session).

**Sexual abuse**

- 5% of male students and 20% of female students reported that they had ever been touched in a sexual way or made to do things they had not wanted.

**Bullying at school**

- 6% of students reported being bullied at school weekly or more often. Of these students 9% of the males and 22% of the females reported a suicide attempt in the last 12 months, which is three times the rate reported by students who had not been bullied weekly or more often.

There are other factors in young people’s lives which are associated with lower rates of suicide behaviours. Some of the important ‘protective factors’ which local and international research has shown are associated with decreased levels of suicide behaviour include:

- Having good mental and emotional wellbeing - 50% of students scored ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’ on the WHO-5 Wellbeing Index.
- Having positive family relationships – 90% of students reported that at least one parent cared a lot about them and 81% reported that their family members got along well or very well.
- Feeling safe at school - 84% of students reported that they felt safe at school.

**Accessing health services**

Professional help should be available for young people with suicidal and self-harm behaviours as well as mental health issues such as depression and emotional worries. 22% of female students and 12% of male students reported that they had seen a health professional for emotional health worries in the previous 12 months.

**Changes since the previous survey in 2001**

- Suicide behaviours among secondary school students in New Zealand appear to have reduced. In 2001, 5% of males and 11% of females reported making a suicide attempt in the last 12 months; while in 2007, this had fallen to 3% of males and 7% of females.
- Mental health of students appears to have improved from 2001 to 2007; the proportion of students showing significant symptoms of depression decreased among males but not females, while the proportion of students feeling positive about their life increased in both sexes.

**Conclusion**

Suicide and self harm behaviours remain a serious concern for a significant number of young New Zealanders. Although there appear to have been some improvements in the health and wellbeing of young people over recent years it is important that social, education and health-related policies and services continue to effectively promote the healthy development of all young people growing up in the 21st century.

---

**If you would like information or support about youth mental health here are some resources:**

**General health & wellbeing:**
- www.youthline.co.nz

**Depression:**
- www.thelowdown.co.nz

**Mental health:**
- www.mentalhealth.org.nz

**Suicide prevention:**
- www.spinz.org.nz

**Violence prevention:**
- www.nzviolenceprevention.org.nz

---


For more information on these results and others from the Youth2000 surveys go to publications at www.youth2000.ac.nz

---

Proudly printed by

Norcross Printing Group

Adolescent Health Research Group

www.youth2000.ac.nz