



MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW RESEARCH: ONE IN THREE AUSTRALIAN TEENS REPORT EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION

One in three Australian teens report that they recently experienced discrimination, according to new research released today by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS).

Teenagers' Experiences of Discrimination, the latest report of Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), found discrimination due to body size or appearance was the most common, followed by race and sex-based discrimination.

Lead researcher Dr Tracy Evans-Whipp said the findings reveal not only a high prevalence of discrimination, but also its adverse impacts.

"That a third of teens are saying they've been treated unfairly or badly because they're somehow 'different' is a real concern, because it shows that discrimination is still very common in our schools and wider society. In many cases, the impacts of discrimination stay with you for life," said Dr Evans-Whipp.

The findings indicate teens who reported discrimination were at higher risk of showing signs of poor mental wellbeing.

Teens who reported facing multiple types of discrimination were at even greater risk, with those experiencing two or more types of discrimination being four times as likely to injure themselves or attempt suicide than those not experiencing discrimination.

"Discrimination has dire consequences for young people. It has real and ongoing impacts on mental health and wellbeing," said Dr Evans-Whipp.

The Study found that body discrimination (due to body size, shape or appearance), the most common form of discrimination reported by a third of teens aged between 14 and 17 years, had damaging repercussions for teens' mental health.

According to the research, more than two thirds (67%) of teens experiencing repeated body discrimination will develop signs of depression. Nearly half (45%) will develop high levels of anxiety, and over a quarter (26%) will injure themselves or attempt suicide.

"That so many young people experience poor mental wellbeing because of something which is preventable should be ringing serious alarm bells. Much more can be done to protect teenagers, but also to teach them how to respect and look after one another," said Dr Evans-Whipp.

The research shows that certain groups are at higher risk of discrimination, for example Indigenous teens, those who speak a language other than English at home, teens with disability, same-sex attracted teens and overweight or obese teens. Females were also more likely to experience discrimination than males.

"The teenage years are already a vulnerable time for mental health problems. It's important that we do everything we can to reduce discrimination and its impact," said Dr Evans-Whipp.

"The evidence tells us we can do this by promoting inclusion and diversity from a young age, in as many contexts as possible. Schools are of course key, but broader community messaging and parent intervention are crucial in promoting acceptance and tolerance, and in turn reducing discrimination," she said.

The report *Teenagers' Experiences of Discrimination* is available at:
<http://www3.aifs.gov.au/institute/media/docs/jPwgiQ08Z/LSAC-Snapshot-1-Discrimination.pdf>

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children has been following the lives of the same 10,000 children since 2004. The older group were asked about their experiences of discrimination when they were aged 12-13 and again at 14-15 and 16-17 years old.

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AIFS conducts original research to increase understanding of Australian families and the issues that affect them, see aifs.gov.au