

Safeguarding Research Matters: Low Distress and Strong Support From Children and Adolescents

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Why Study Distress in Research?

- Participation in sensitive research may evoke emotional responses
- Concerns about distress can influence research decisions
- Children's experiences of participation remain underexplored



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The Children and Young People's Safety Project

2018–2024

2018 2019 2020 2021 2022 2023 2024

Data collected over 7 years



Organisations self-enrolled



Children, young people and adults completed the surveys



Organisations received dashboard results

Used to inform safeguarding improvement

Whose data is in this study?



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) status



95.5%
No



4.0%
Yes



0.5%
Missing

Gender breakdown



51%
Female



47.5%
Male



1.5%
Described their gender in another way
(diverse / non-binary)

Age Groups



1,510
30.5%
10–12 years



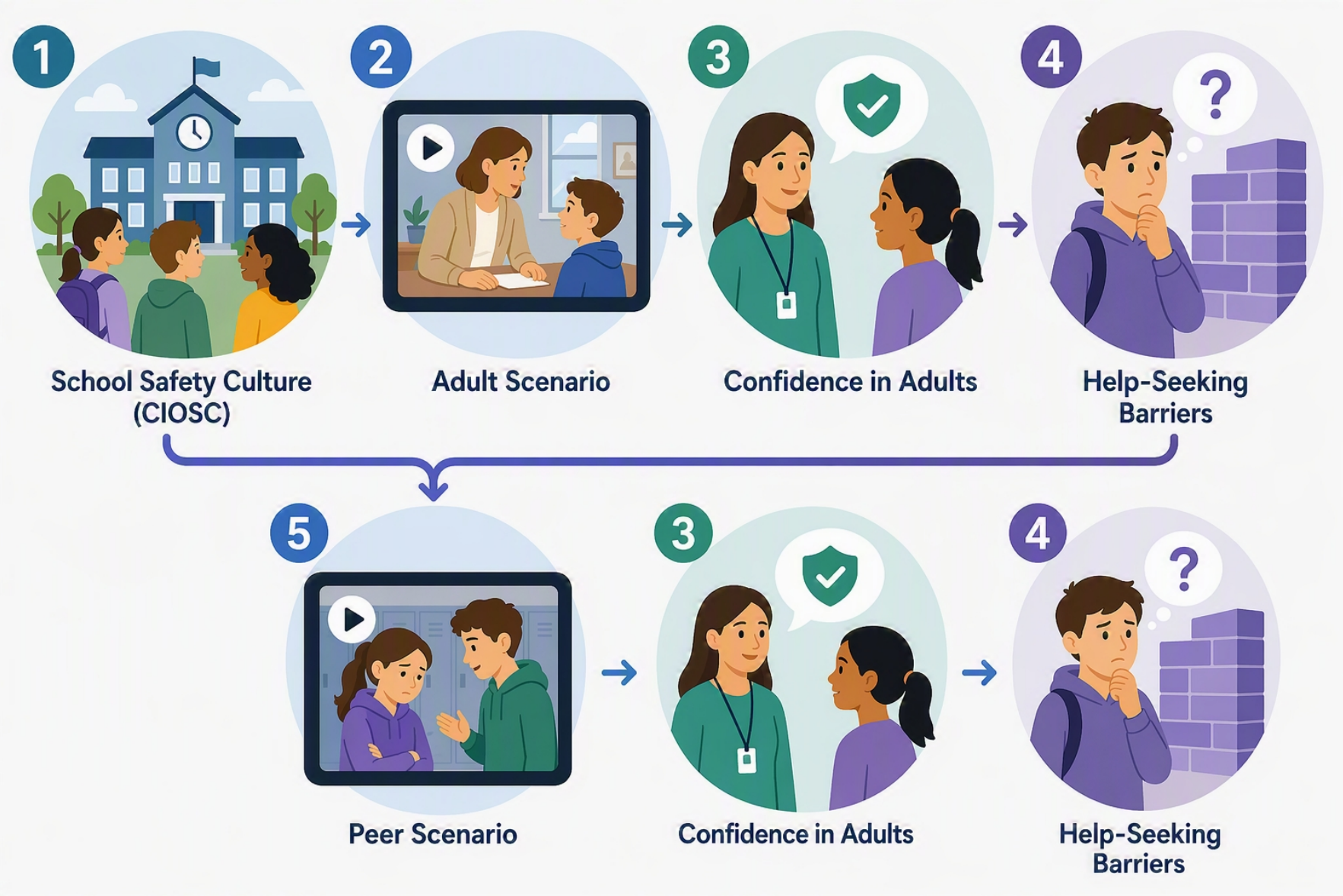
2,362
47.7%
13–15 years



1,080
21.8%
16–18 years

Understanding the safety measures

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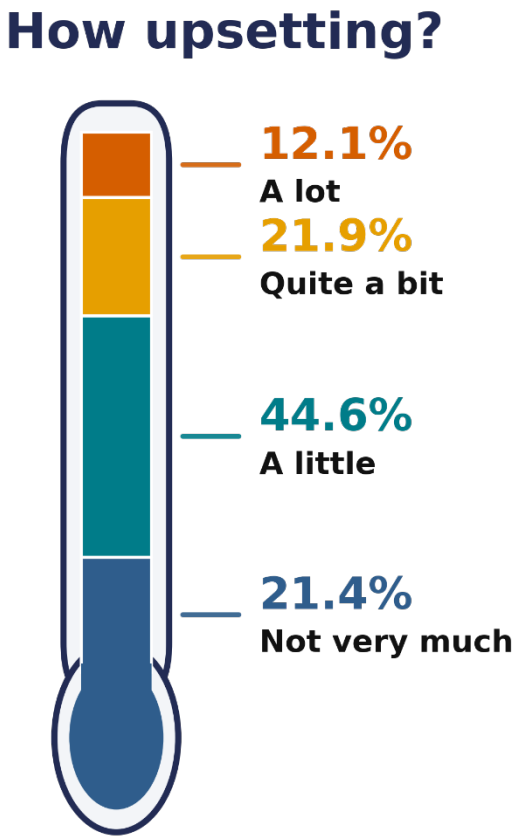
Understanding the Distress and Importance Measures



How Did Children Respond?

- 90% - Not upset by participation
- 88% - Would participate again
- 76% - Would still have agreed to participate
- 3.77 / 5 - Importance of participation

Distress and Value Coexisted



Value remained

77.1%
would still have agreed to participate

55.9%
rated participation quite/extremely important

Experiencing distress did not necessarily mean children regretted participating.

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What Predicts Distress?

OR = 0.47

95% CI
0.34–0.65

School Safety Culture



OR = 0.61

95% CI
0.53–0.70

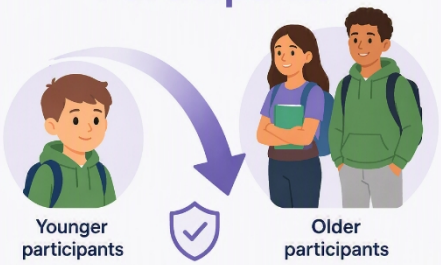
Perceived Benefit



OR = 0.53

95% CI
0.38–0.74

Older Participants



Older participants had lower odds of reporting distress.

OR = 3.24

95% CI
2.21–4.75

Gender Diverse



Gender-diverse participants had higher odds of distress.

OR = 1.79

95% CI
1.05–3.07

Indigenous Participants



Indigenous participants had higher odds of distress.

Adjusted odds ratios from multivariable logistic regression.

What this means

Research is not risk free

Some children experienced distress during participation

Distress does not indicate harm

Most participants would still take part again and rated participation as important.

Ethics Through Children's Eyes

Decisions about sensitive research should consider potential discomfort and perceived value.

Distress and value can coexist in children’s research participation.

Key Takeaways

- Children and young people generally viewed participation in safeguarding research positively.
- Some participants (~10%) reported distress, but many also considered participation worthwhile.
- Distress and perceived value were not mutually exclusive experiences.
- Children's perspectives can help inform ethical decisions about research participation.

ORCID ID

Research Gate