

Working through it

A Youth Survey report on
economically disadvantaged
young people



MISSION
AUSTRALIA Youth Survey
2018



We would like to acknowledge the Mission Australia staff who contributed to this report by providing helpful insights, clarity and examples of current and past programs that support young people. Their insight serves to remind that behind the data, figures and words are young people, with their own families, experiences, culture and backgrounds. We would like to thank Amanda Beattie, Cory Clarke, Chenae Doust, Sally Al Mouallem, Aimee Smith, Christiana Campbell, Brad Nightingale, Phary Stamatis and Phillip Hogan for their valuable time and for their ongoing support of young people in their programs.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are the future leaders.

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Executive summary

This report considers the similarities and differences between two groups of young people who took part in the *Mission Australia Youth Survey 2018*: those who reported that neither parent or guardian was currently in paid employment, compared with those who identified that at least one parent or guardian had paid employment, whether part- or full-time.

For the purpose of this report, those in households without a parent or guardian working are classified as 'economically disadvantaged'. It should be noted that economic advantage/disadvantage cannot easily be segregated using this data alone as the circumstances, characteristics and experiences of those facing economic disadvantage are more complex than the survey can determine. However, this distinction is made in this paper in order to advocate for young people who experience disadvantages through their parent/s or guardian/s unemployment.

Key findings

Aspirations for study and work

- The majority (85.0%) of economically disadvantaged young people were studying full-time; however, this proportion was lower than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (94.8%).
- Compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work, more than three times the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported they were not studying (10.2% compared with 3.1% respectively).
- Levels of study satisfaction for economically disadvantaged young people was lower than for respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (61.6% either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* compared with 69.4% respectively).
- More than twice the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people did not plan to complete Year 12 (7.3% compared with 3.4% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).
- Economically disadvantaged young people were less confident in their ability to achieve their post-school goals: 14.5% indicated that they were *slightly confident* or *not at all confident*, compared

with 9.6% of participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work.

- Half (50.3%) of economically disadvantaged respondents reported *go to university* as their plan after finishing school (however, this proportion was lower than found among respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work: 68.0%).

Conversely, one in five (20.2%) economically disadvantaged young people indicated plans to *go to TAFE or college*, compared with just over one in eight respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (13.5%).

- Economically disadvantaged young people reported lower levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their post-school plans, compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (42.7% reported they were *extremely/very confident* compared with 49.1%, respectively).

Employment

- A much smaller proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported that they were working part-time (25.8% compared with 43.7% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Key findings (cont.)

- Conversely, a greater proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported that they were looking for work (45.8% compared with 33.7% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).
- *extremely/very concerned* about these issues, compared with 15.8%, 17.1% and 10.3% respectively).
- Economically disadvantaged young people also reported higher levels of personal concern about *domestic/family violence, bullying/emotional abuse* and *suicide*.

Barriers to finding work

- A notably higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated that they felt there were barriers impacting upon them finding work (51.9% compared with 38.0% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).
Compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work, economically disadvantaged young people were more likely to indicate that the majority of the items listed as potential barriers were impacting upon them finding work; especially *lack of jobs* (19.1% compared with 11.9%), *mental health* (13.8% compared with 7.3%), *lack of family support* (7.9% compared with 2.3%) and *family responsibilities* (12.8% compared with 7.7%).

Barriers to moving out of home

- The top three barriers economically disadvantaged young people considered to be impacting upon them moving out of home in the future were *housing costs (e.g. rent, utilities)*, *financial stability* and *availability of housing*.
- A much higher proportion of disadvantaged young people reported *lack of family support* as a barrier (17.6% compared with 9.9% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).

Issues of personal concern

- Compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work, economically disadvantaged young people reported much higher levels of personal concern about *financial security*, *family conflict* and *discrimination* (27.3%, 24.7% and 16.1% indicated they were

Sources of support

- Economically disadvantaged young people were less likely than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work to turn to their *friend/s* (77.8%), *parent/s or guardian/s* (66.0%) or a *relative/family friend* (55.8%) for support with important issues (compared with 85.2%), 76.9% and 60.1% respectively).
- A much higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they would turn to a *community agency* for help with important issues (19.6% compared with 12.7% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).
- Nearly one in five (19.4%) economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling they did not have someone they could turn to if they were in trouble or a crisis (compared with 8.4% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Participation in activities

- Lower proportions of economically disadvantaged young people took part in *sports (as a participant)* (43.3% compared with 65.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work) and *sports (as spectator)* (24.8% compared with 42.2%), as well as *volunteer work* (29.0% compared with 37.9%) and *student leadership activities* (20.1% compared with 28.4%).

Wellbeing, happiness and the future

- More than double the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling *very sad/sad* with life as a whole (19.3% compared with

Key findings (cont.)

- 9.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).
- A higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling *negative* or *very negative* about the future (15.7% compared with 9.4% of participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).
- Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work felt a greater sense of control over their lives than economically disadvantaged young people (36.3% indicated *high/full control* compared with 27.3% respectively).
- Conversely, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling that they had *no/low control* over their lives (12.9% compared with 7.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Policy recommendations

- Effective educational engagement and alternative education programs should be expanded for young people at risk of disengaging or who have already disengaged from school, to support their pathway into future work or study.
- Financial barriers to accessing university, TAFE and other training programs need to be addressed and supports put in place for ongoing engagement for economically disadvantaged young people.
- Investment in youth employment programs should be targeted and tailored to the most disadvantaged young job seekers and to those programs demonstrated to be effective in assisting young people transition from education to training and employment.
- Economic development opportunities and partnerships between business and community could be expanded to offer more job opportunities in local areas and to support young people in their skill development
- Greater efforts are needed to overcome a lack of transport as a barrier to young people finding work including programs to assist young people to obtain a driving license and improved access to and availability of public transport in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.
- Young people's participation in extra-curricular activities should be facilitated and encouraged to build skills, networks and understanding of employment pathways. Financial barriers need to be addressed and community facilities improved in lower socioeconomic areas.
- Improved employment supports are required for parents and guardians in economically disadvantaged families to secure work which will have a positive impact on family relationships and young people's sense of agency and confidence.
- While parents are not in paid work, income support must be adequate to meet basic family needs. Rates of Newstart and Youth Allowance need to be increased to reduce the stress that financial insecurity places on family life.
- Youth friendly programs and safe spaces should be facilitated and expanded as soft entry points to help young people to build their resilience and confidence.
- Youth services should be co-designed with young people and young people's voice should be included in the development of local community services and programs.

Introduction

Put simply, ‘jobs help families stay out of poverty.’¹ However, not all families are economically supported by a full or part time income, which can result in an increased risk of disadvantage. Young people living in these families may face greater challenges to their transition into adulthood — particularly around wellbeing, school achievement and future work or study opportunities.

A key objective of the annual Mission Australia Youth Survey is to gain insight into young people’s experiences and transition into adulthood in order to advocate for support programs and policy approaches that address their needs. This report highlights the challenges facing disadvantaged young people: focussing specifically on those young people who live in households without paid employment. The findings underscore the need for targeted policy and service responses to address the risks of entrenched disadvantage through education, employment and community programs.

Work insecurity and income inequality are growing social and economic problems in Australia.² The proportion of workers in Australia who are underemployed is now at its highest level in forty years.³ Youth and long-term unemployment and underemployment trends continue to increase over time,⁴ particularly for those young people living in regional areas;⁵ in excess of fifty thousand young people had been unemployed for at least one year at September 2017, which is more than three times the number before the Global Financial Crisis.⁶ In 2015-16, there were an estimated 481,200 low-income households with dependent children in Australia living in relative

income poverty, on an equivalised disposable income of \$542.00 per week.⁷ Around one in seven (15%) people dependent on income support live with deep and persistent disadvantage.⁸ Indeed, fluctuations in the global economy over recent decades have created insecure labour conditions;⁹ more limited opportunities for social and economic mobility; and an increased risk of income poverty for many.

This picture of disadvantage and poverty becomes even starker for those families living without an income from paid employment.

¹ Strazdins et al. 2011, 13

² Australian Council of Trade Unions 2017

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017b; see also Wilkins and Lass 2018, 62

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017b; see also Allan and Bowman 2018, 1; Letts 2019

⁵ Brotherhood of St Laurence 2019, 3

⁶ Brotherhood of St Laurence 2017, 4; see also Brotherhood of St Laurence 2018, 2

⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. See also St Vincent de Paul Society 2014, 3

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017a

⁹ Letts 2019

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there were 339,000 'jobless families' in Australia in June 2017, which accounts for 11% of all Australian families with dependents.¹⁰ Of these, 128,100 were couple families with dependents, while 210,900 were sole-parent families with dependents.¹¹

'Joblessness' or 'worklessness' — being without work, but neither actively looking for nor available to start work — may arise for a range of reasons.¹² It may include people who are unable to work as they live with complex disability or are in ill health;¹³ people who had previously searched for work but evolved into a semi-permanent state of entrenched joblessness;¹⁴ as well as people with responsibilities caring for children or family members, which would make full-time work unmanageable.

Policy debates have shifted over the past thirty years from discussions of the negative effects of unemployment to a wider conceptualisation of 'joblessness,' with a view to its longer-term impact upon families and children.¹⁵ People and families who live without paid employment over an extended period are at an increased risk of poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion.¹⁶

In general terms, families without paid employment: are disproportionately sole-parent families;¹⁷ live in lower socio-economic neighbourhoods; have poorer social capital;¹⁸ have lower levels of education;¹⁹ and experience greater challenges to their psychological and financial wellbeing.²⁰ Compared with couple families, sole-parent families (especially those headed by a mother only) are at an even greater risk of financial hardship,²¹ and increased levels of psychological distress.²²

Even in instances when the mother of a sole-parent family is employed, many remain socioeconomically disadvantaged due to overall lower income:²³ the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates that children living in sole-parent families are more than three times as likely to live in relative income poverty than those living in dual-parent families.²⁴ In contrast, families with two adults employed full-time generally have higher levels of income on average. As such, they are more likely to have fewer financial hardships and, in turn, are less likely to experience poverty and economic disadvantage if they are able to maintain full employment.

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017. Note: The Australian Bureau of Statistics highlights that there were 1.4 million 'jobless families' in Australia in June 2017. However, this figure includes a majority (1.1 million) of jobless families without dependents, which would include older retirees. Hence the figure of 339,000 'jobless families' with dependents in Australia as of June 2017 is more accurate for the purposes of the current report.

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017b

¹² Baxter et al. 2012, 2

¹³ Department for Work and Pensions: UK Government 2017, 11

¹⁴ Saunders 2002, 5; see also Brotherhood of St Laurence 2019, 8

¹⁵ Baxter et al. 2012, 2

¹⁶ Baxter et al. 2012, 2

¹⁷ Strazdins et al. 2011, 45, 75

¹⁸ Baxter et al. 2012, 29

¹⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017c

²⁰ Baxter et al. 2012, 2–4

²¹ Baxter et al. 2012, 23

²² Strazdins et al. 2011, 45, 75. See also Baxter et al. 2012, 35

²³ Strazdins et al. 2011, 43

²⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017b

How can we understand economic disadvantage?

This report focuses on young people who identified in the *Youth Survey 2018* that neither parent or guardian was currently in paid employment. The effects of long-term family unemployment and the potential risk of poverty are typically measured according to the 'poverty line' minimum income threshold—which are helpful in analysing population-level experiences of poverty—or approaches that focus on experiences of 'deprivation' or 'social exclusion' on the basis of limited economic resources. This report adds another perspective by focussing on the particular disadvantages and challenges faced by young people that live in households without income from parental paid employment.

Centring upon on the notion of disadvantage, we consider the way that limited resources and opportunities intersect with economic and other social factors to shape the aspirations and outcomes of young people as they transition into adulthood. In short, we focus here on the experience of disadvantage and consider the impact of low family income and economic disadvantage upon young people. This brings another perspective that gives voice to young people's experiences within the field of study on the economic dimension of poverty (such as those living on or under the 'poverty-line'²⁵ or exclusion on the basis of deprivation) and the increasing problems associated with poverty in Australia.²⁶

Poverty-line approaches centre upon the income of adults living within a household, typically focussing on income from paid employment. This focus comes to 'define children as poor if they live in households that are poor, where this depends on the incomes of adult

members of the household.'²⁷ Poverty-line income-level estimates are helpful to identify and assess people at risk of poverty across large populations, and are widely used both in Australia and internationally. Yet, this focus on income alone must be complimented by a closer focus on the range of experiences of young people living in families with low or no income, as well as the impact of limited income upon young people's post-school transitions, aspirations and wellbeing.

'Material deprivation' approaches complement poverty-line analyses by considering the way that people experience social exclusion on the basis of whether they are un/able to afford a range of essential items that are needed to maintain an acceptable standard of living.²⁸

A recent study by The Smith Family considered household income poverty and deprivation from a child or youth centred perspective.²⁹ Poverty here is similarly identified as a lack of material resources; yet their study rested upon a wider conceptualisation of poverty as a form of social



²⁵ See for example the ACOSS report, *Poverty in Australia 2018*. See Davidson et al. 2018, 22

²⁶ See for example: Davidson et al. 2018; Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2016; Saunders 2011; Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2018

exclusion through deprivation, which arises when people are ‘deprived of the “normal activities” that define their roles as family and community members, consumers, workers and social agents in society.’³⁰

We suggest that the impact of limited economic resources reaches beyond simply being ‘deprived’ of the ability to have ‘normal’ consumer items (either themselves or in their household) or unable to take part in ‘normal activities’. Young people’s experience of economic disadvantage goes beyond simply ‘missing out’ due to material reasons alone.

Economic disadvantage is multidimensional. It relates not only to material factors, but to the range of opportunities or capabilities at a person’s disposal.³¹ This reveals the crux of the issue.

Some people are advantaged on the basis of their economic status, class and social identity, which affords many opportunities for identity formation, development and social mobility. Others are disadvantaged not because they do not have the necessary skills or disposition, but because they lack the same opportunities due, again, to their socioeconomic status and related sociodemographic factors.

Young people from households without paid work experience multidimensional disadvantage. They generally have more limited access to opportunities in education and employment.³² They typically have smaller networks and poorer social capital (or suffer from ‘network poverty’³³), which means they lack the social connections that enable them to build a network of opportunities in work and study.³⁴

Disadvantaged young people may rule out options because of unconscious influences,⁴⁴ formed as a result of personal experiences and their socialisation into the expected norms of their socioeconomic class.⁴⁵ Family and school expectations may be lower for these young people, which may result in weaker aspirations, or even withdrawal from the education system.⁴⁶ These young people may be ‘less likely to successfully navigate from where they are to where they want to be in the future, particularly if they are attempting to navigate pathways that are outside their experience or the experience of their sociocultural group.’⁴⁷ Finally, young people from families without paid work may also experience social isolation or become stigmatised and negatively stereotyped.

• **Simply put: not only are young people from families without paid employment disadvantaged right now, economically and socially—they are more likely to remain disadvantaged across their life-course.**

• **These young people grow up and form their identities in a ‘social context defined by limitations, deprivations and stigmatizations,’⁴⁸ which arise from economic circumstances ‘neither of their own making nor within their control.’⁴⁹ All this has repercussions for young people’s transition into adulthood and their potential for upward social and economic mobility.**

²⁷ Saunders et al. 2018, 1, emphasis added. See also Sollis 2019, 19–20.

²⁸ Saunders et al. 2018, 16. See also Sollis 2019, 20–22.

²⁹ Saunders et al. 2018, 18–19

³⁰ Saunders et al. 2018, 18

³¹ Sollis 2019, 23–27. See also Sen 1999

³² Allan and Bowman 2018; see also Wyn and White 2000, 175

³³ MacDonald et al. 2005, 884

³⁴ O’Brien 2018

⁴⁴ O’Brien 2018

⁴⁵ Webb et al. 2015, 49; Redmond et al. 2014, 37

⁴⁶ Kintrea, St Clair, and Houston 2011, 67

⁴⁷ Parker et al. 2013, 13–14

⁴⁸ Lahusen and Giugni 2016, 2

⁴⁹ Roberts 2003, 23

How does economic disadvantage impact young people's transition into adulthood?

Research has found that challenges around parental un/underemployment impact upon young people through a variety of dimensions. Un- or underemployment, poor work conditions and/or job insecurity may undermine children's wellbeing both directly and by proxy: these experiences erode their parents' wellbeing, which impacts family relationships;³⁵ and, poverty has been found negatively impact children's wellbeing factors, particularly around bullying, social exclusion and mental health.³⁶ Parental job insecurity has also been associated with poorer academic performance,³⁷ an increased risk of emotional and behavioural problems in children and young people,³⁸ and lower aspirations and confidence in achieving their post-school goals.³⁹

Families without paid employment generally hold lower levels of educational attainment than those in full-time working households. The education level of parents is a characteristic that is 'known to shape school attitudes and participation[,] influence the transition to adulthood[,] and influence employment orientations' of children and young people.⁴⁰ In particular, parents or guardians play a key role in supporting young people's education outcomes and planning for their post-school pathways.⁴¹ Australian research has found that students whose parents want them to attend university are significantly more likely to complete Year 12 than those whose parents would like them to choose a non-university pathway.⁴²

Conversely, families 'without experience in tertiary education left the decision to the young people, who in turn relied on friends and other school networks.'⁴³ Importantly, as noted previously, economically disadvantaged young people have more limited networks and potentially more fragmented support systems. Without appropriate support and guidance to

transition from school into further study or work, disadvantaged young people are at increased risk of becoming entrenched in cycles of disadvantage, and are more likely to 'remain not involved in education, employment or training over the long term.'⁵⁰

Mission Australia hold the view that all young people must have the best foundation for learning and development, as well as pathways to economic participation. We recognise the importance of later adolescence as a transition stage from childhood to adulthood, in which young people make significant choices and take steps toward their independence. To understand the diversity of young people's experiences and to inform the types of support that they may require, Mission Australia runs the annual *Youth Survey*. This large survey engages young people in Australia between the ages of 15 and 19 and poses a range of questions around education, employment, and barriers to achieving their goals among others.

While much of the literature around children and young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds focuses on younger age ranges (such as 5 to 11, or 12 to 14), the Mission Australia *Youth Survey* provides additional insights into an older cohort of young people, already in the midst of their transition period.

This *Youth Survey* report considers the impact of parental unemployment upon young people's transition. In particular, we focus on their engagement with education and employment; their personal concerns, wellbeing and sense of efficacy over their lives; as well as their support systems. As the above discussion has demonstrated, economically disadvantaged young people's experiences and transition into adulthood may be much more complex. The purpose of this report is to bring their stories to light, in order to advocate for programs and policies that address their needs.

Method

The Mission Australia Youth Survey continues to be the largest annual survey of young people of its kind in Australia. In 2018, Mission Australia conducted its 17th annual survey, receiving 28,286 responses from young people aged 15 to 19 years.

The *Youth Survey 2018* sought to capture the views and perspectives of young people on a broad range of issues, including: education and employment, participation in community activities, general wellbeing, values and concerns, preferred sources of support, as well as feelings about the future. Alongside the socio-demographic questions, respondents were asked about the employment status of their parent/s and/or guardians. To answer this question, respondents were offered five options for each parent/guardian: *Yes, full-time*; *Yes, part-time*; *No*; *Not sure*; and *Not applicable*.

In this report, we compare the responses of this group of economically disadvantaged young people against the responses of *Youth Survey* participants with at least one parent or guardian in either full-time or part-time work. Those who indicated that they were *Not sure*, that the question was *Not applicable*, or those who did not answer this question, have been excluded from the analysis.

This report focuses on respondents who identified that neither parent or guardian had full or part-time paid employment. We have classified this group of respondents as ‘economically disadvantaged’ young people, according to the following definition.

Definitional points

We use the term ‘economically disadvantaged young people’ throughout this report. Specifically, ‘economic disadvantage’ here relates to the lack of resources, access and opportunities available to young people and their family on the basis of unemployment. This definition serves to focus the following analysis on the social experience and processes of disadvantage that impact upon young people’s transition into adulthood.

Nonetheless, we recognise that economic factors are just one dimension of disadvantage. Young people’s experience of lived disadvantage in Australia may indeed be further compounded when combined with other aspects of their lives — such as whether they are living with a disability; whether they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; whether they are from a migrant family and/or from a non-English speaking background; whether they are female, or identify as LGBTIQ+; or whether they live in a regional or remote area, among many other factors.

In light of this, we recognise that many of our respondents may have intersecting dimensions of disadvantage. However, given we solely consider disadvantage according to economic factors in this report, the term ‘economically disadvantaged’ young people will be used throughout.

³⁵ Strazdins et al. 2011, 99

³⁶ Sollis 2019, 64–67

³⁷ Strazdins et al. 2011, 11

³⁸ Moulton et al. 2015. See also Australian Institute of Family Studies 2015; Strazdins et al. 2011, 49

³⁹ Webb et al. 2015, 7–8; Kintrea, St Clair, and Houston 2011, 67

⁴⁰ Pullman and Andres 2019, 291. See also Department for Work and Pensions: UK Government 2017, 11.

⁴¹ Parker et al. 2013, 43

⁴² Gemici et al. 2014, 13 17

⁴³ Webb et al. 2015, 49

⁵⁰ Butler and Muir 2017, 316

Key findings

Demographic characteristics of economically disadvantaged young people

A total of 26,935 young people who took part in the *Youth Survey 2018* responded to the question regarding the employment status of their parents. The vast majority of these (96.0%) had at least one parent or guardian in either full-time or part-time work.

A total of 1,080 (4.0%) young people who took part in the *Youth Survey 2018* reported that neither guardian was currently in paid employment.

Over half (55.6%) of economically disadvantaged respondents were female and around four in ten (41.4%) were male.

A total of 16.3% of economically disadvantaged respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The proportion of respondents who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander was three times higher among economically disadvantaged respondents (16.3% compared

with 4.7% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

More than one in five (21.3%) economically disadvantaged young people indicated they were born overseas (compared with 14.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). Additionally, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they spoke a language other than English at home (28.1% compared with 18.6% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).

One in eight economically disadvantaged young people reported that they were living with a disability (12.2%). This proportion of reported disability was double that among respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (12.2% compared with 6.0%). For economically disadvantaged young people, the most frequently cited disabilities were (in order of frequency): autism, physical disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Education

The majority (85.0%) of economically disadvantaged young people were studying full-time. This was lower than for respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (94.8%). More than three times the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported they were not studying (10.2% compared to 3.1% of participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

The majority of economically disadvantaged young people were studying at school (92.9% compared with

96.8% of participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Over twice the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people were studying at TAFE, compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (5.3% compared with 2.0%).

As shown in Table 2, six in ten (61.6%) economically disadvantaged young people said that they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies.

Compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work, a lower proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (69.4% compared with 61.6% respectively).

Conversely, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people were *dissatisfied* or *very dissatisfied* with their studies (10.6% compared with 6.7% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Table 1: Participation in education

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Studying full-time	85.0	94.8
Studying part-time	4.8	2.1
Not studying	10.2	3.1

Table 2: Satisfaction with studies

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Very satisfied	12.4	12.8
Satisfied	49.2	56.6
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	27.9	23.9
Dissatisfied	6.2	5.2
Very dissatisfied	4.4	1.5

Plans after finishing school

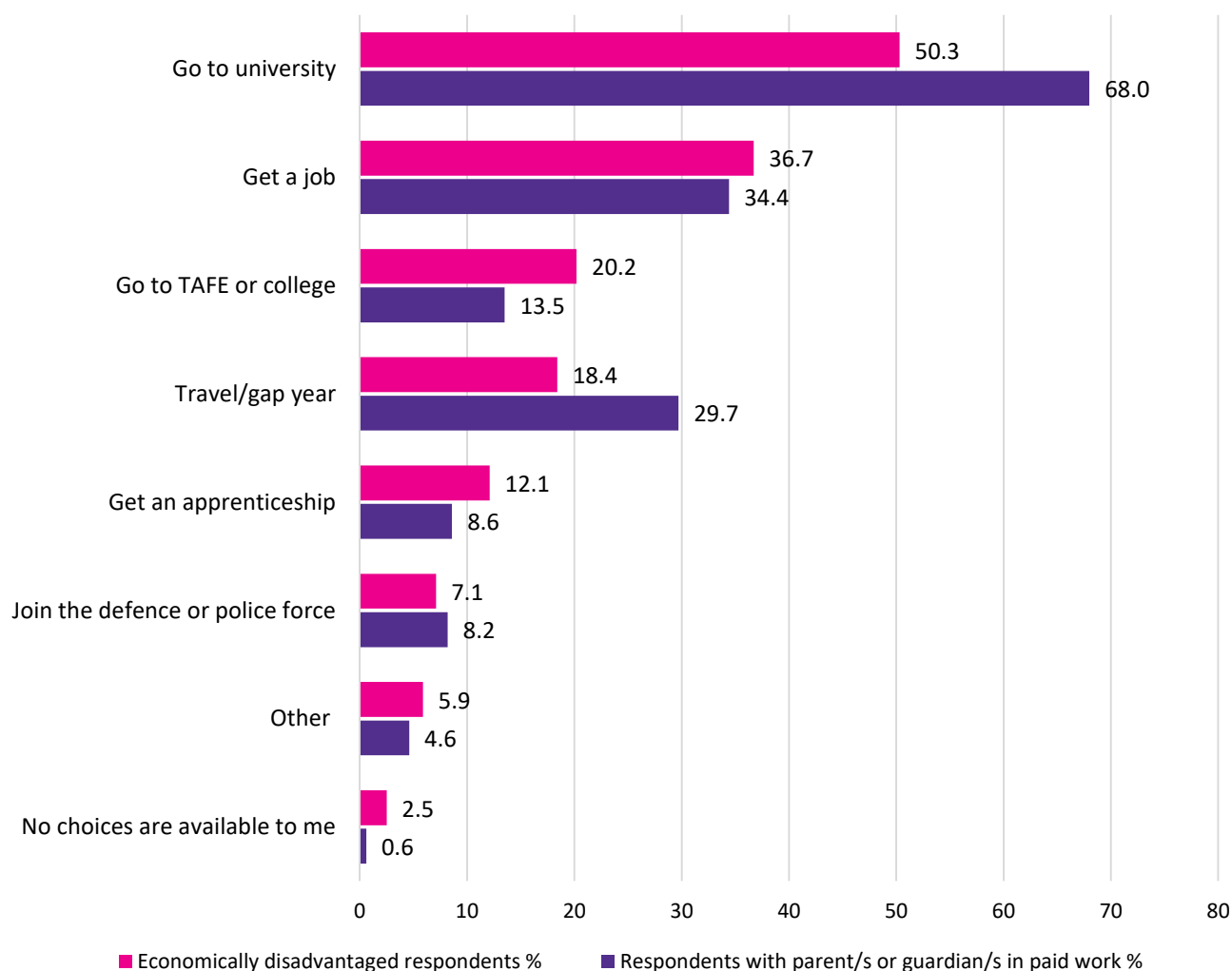
Of those that were still at school, a total of 92.7% of economically disadvantaged young people planned to complete Year 12 (comparable to respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work: 96.6%). More than twice the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people did not plan to complete Year 12 (7.3% compared with 3.4% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Go to university was the most frequently reported post-school plan for disadvantaged young people (50.3%). However, economically disadvantaged young people reported this post-school plan at a much lower rate compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (68.0%).

Conversely, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they planned to *go to TAFE or college* after finishing school (20.2% compared with 13.5% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). A much lower proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated *travel/gap year* plans (18.4% compared with 29.7% for participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).

Over four times the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people felt that no options were available to them (2.5% compared with 0.6% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).

Figure 1: Plans after finishing school



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency amongst economically disadvantaged respondents.

How confident are young people in achieving their study/work goals?

Participants were asked how confident they were in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school. Table 3 shows that over four in ten (42.7%) economically disadvantaged respondents indicated that they were *extremely* or *very confident* in their ability to achieve their study/work goals. However, their levels of confidence were lower than those respondents whose parent/s or

guardian/s were in paid work (42.7% compared with 49.1%).

Additionally, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated that they were only *slightly confident* or *not at all confident* in their ability to achieve their goals (14.5% compared with 9.6% of participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Table 3: Confidence in achieving study/work goals

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Extremely confident	10.1	10.6
Very confident	32.6	38.5
Somewhat confident	42.8	41.3
Slightly confident	9.8	7.1
Not at all confident	4.7	2.5

Employment

Respondents were asked if they had paid employment and, if so, to specify how many hours they worked in an average week.

Only a small minority of respondents from both cohorts reported that they were employed full-time. However, this is not surprising given the percentage of respondents who were still at school.

A much smaller proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported that they were working part-time (25.8% compared with 43.7% of

respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Conversely, a greater proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported that they were looking for work (45.8% compared with 33.7% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

A higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people also reported that they were neither working nor looking for work (27.8% compared with 22.2%).

Table 3: Participation in paid employment

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Employed full-time	0.6	0.4
Employed part-time	25.8	43.7
Not in paid employment, looking for work	45.8	33.7
Not in paid employment, NOT looking for work	27.8	22.2

Barriers to finding work

Young people were asked whether they felt there are any barriers which may be impacting upon them finding work. A notably higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated

that they felt there were barriers impacting upon them finding work (51.9% compared with 38.0% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).

Barriers to finding work (cont.)

Respondents who indicated the presence of barriers were then asked to indicate from a number of items the barrier/s that were preventing them from finding work. The top three barriers that economically disadvantaged young people considered to be impacting upon them finding work were *school responsibilities* (19.9%), *lack of skills/experience* (19.2%) and *lack of jobs* (19.1%).

As shown in Figure 2 below, economically disadvantaged young people were more likely than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work to indicate that the majority of the items listed as potential barriers were impacting upon them finding work.

Notably, over three times the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported *lack of family support* as a barrier (7.9% compared with 2.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work, higher proportions of economically disadvantaged young people additionally reported that *lack of jobs* (19.1% compared with 11.9%), *mental health* (13.8% compared with 7.3%), *lack of family support* (7.9% compared with 2.3%), *family responsibilities* (12.8% compared with 7.7%), *lack of skills/experience* (19.2% compared with 14.4%), *physical health* (6.8% compared with 2.4%) and *transport* (15.7% compared with 11.5%) were impacting upon them finding work.

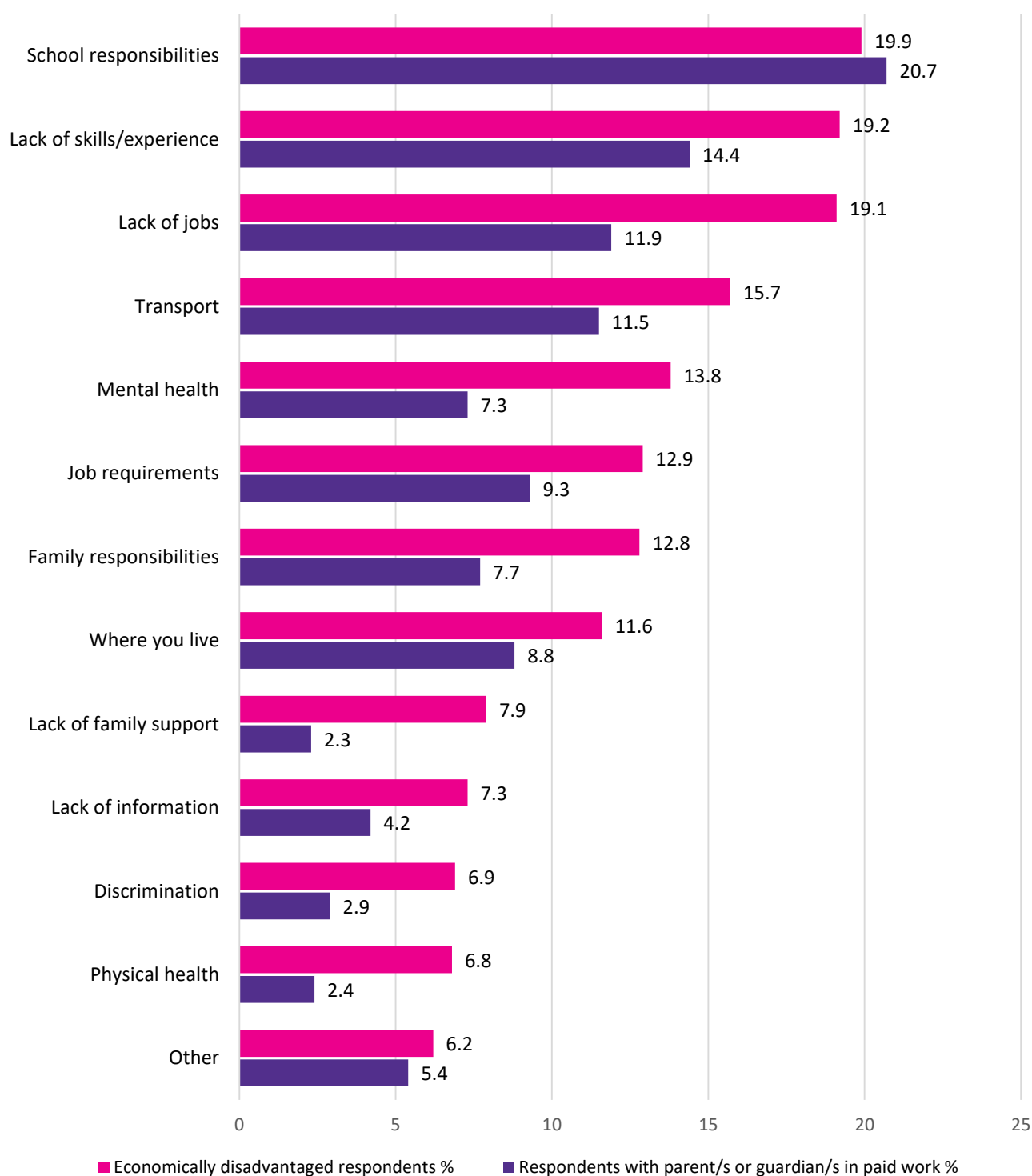
Barriers to moving out of home in the future

Young people were asked whether they felt there were any barriers which may impact upon them moving out of home in the future. For economically disadvantaged young people, six in ten (59.9%) indicated that *housing costs* (e.g. rent, utilities) would be a future barrier to moving out of home, followed by *financial stability* (57.6%) and *availability of housing* (40.0%).

As shown in Figure 3, these were the same top three barriers to moving out of home for respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work. However, the proportions for the majority of barriers to moving out of home were generally lower among economically disadvantaged respondents.

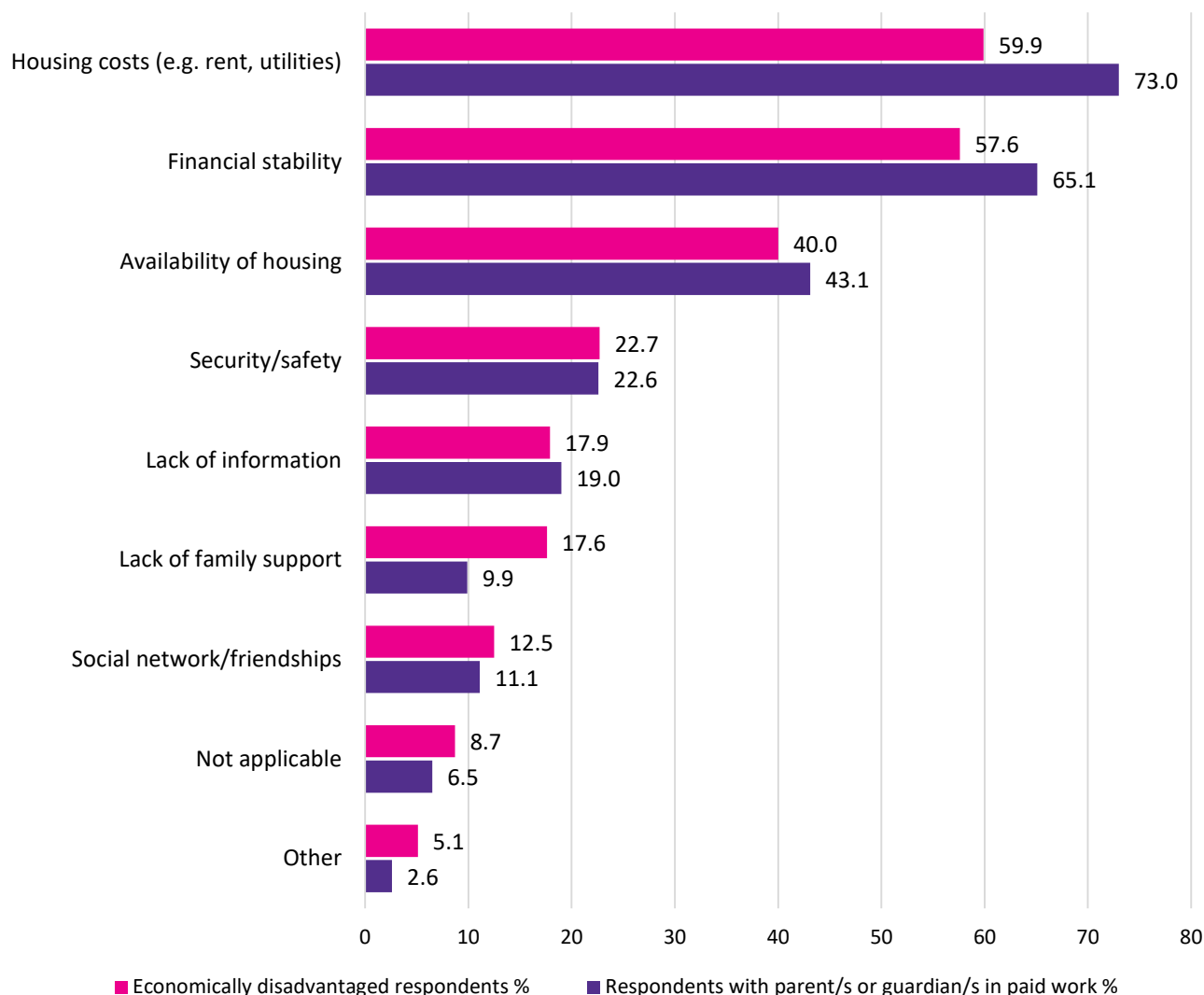
A much higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported *lack of family support* as a barrier (17.6% compared with 9.9% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Figure 2: Barriers to finding work



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency amongst economically disadvantaged respondents.

Figure 3: Barriers to moving out of home in the future



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency amongst economically disadvantaged respondents.

Issues of personal concern to young people

Young people were asked to rank how concerned they had been about a number of issues over the past year. Their responses were rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from *extremely concerned* to *not at all concerned*. The items were ranked according to the summed responses for *extremely* and *very concerned* for each item.

As shown in Figure 4, *coping with stress, school or study problems* and *mental health* were the top three items of personal concern for both economically disadvantaged young people and respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work, which were reported at similar levels by both cohorts (41.7%, 34.7% and 33.5% of economically disadvantaged young people compared with 43.1%, 34.4% and 31.0% of participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).

Key differences

As shown in Figure 4, economically disadvantaged young people reported much higher levels of concern than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work about *financial security* (27.3% compared with 15.8%) and *family conflict* (24.7% compared with 17.1%).

Additionally, economically disadvantaged young people indicated higher levels of personal concern about *discrimination* (16.1% compared with 10.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work), *domestic/family violence* (14.2% compared with 9.2%), *bullying/emotional abuse* (20.0% compared with 15.2%) and *suicide* (20.2% compared with 15.4%).

What issues do young people think are the most important in Australia today?

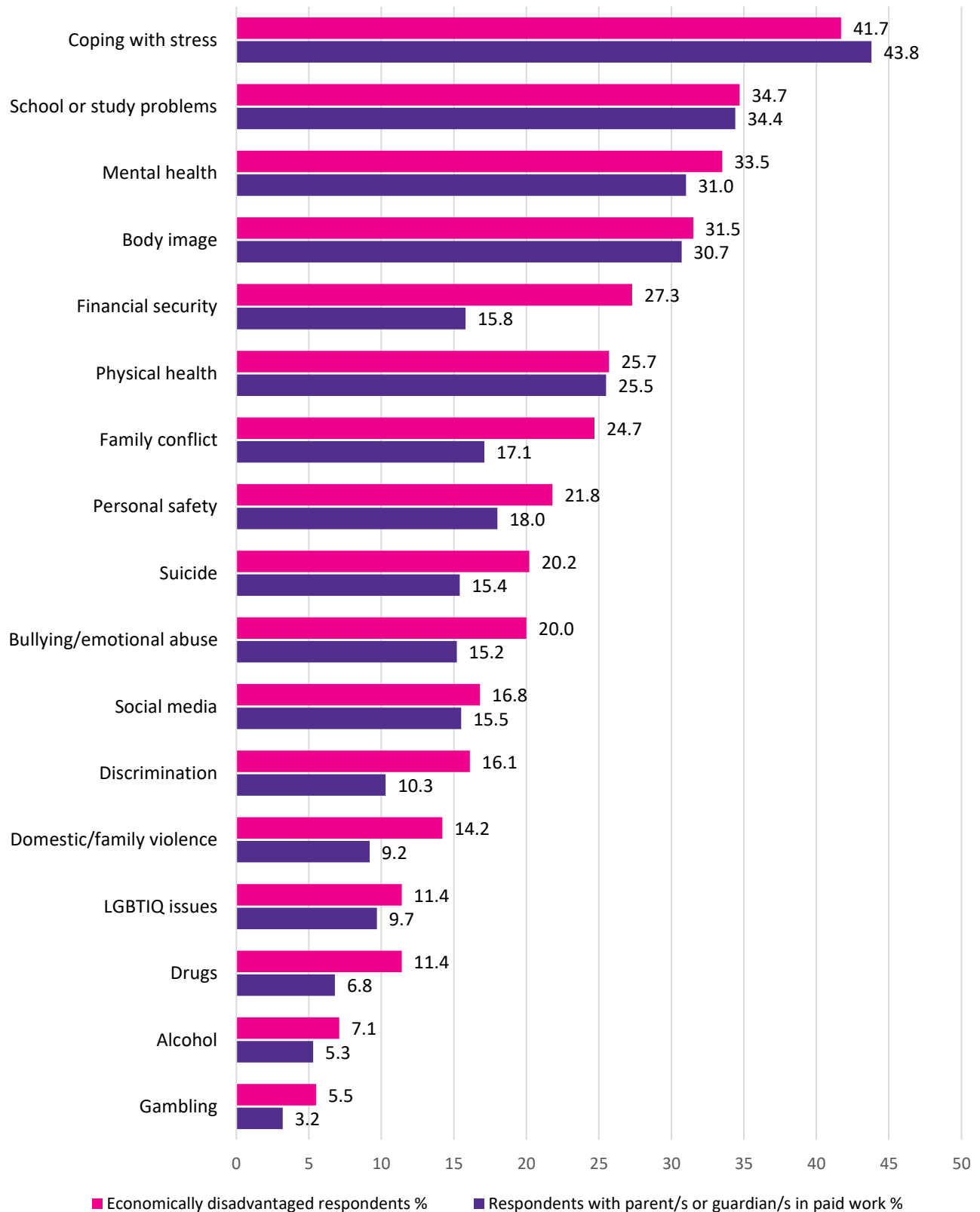
Young people were asked to list the three issues they considered were the most important in Australia today. The information provided by respondents was categorised and is listed in order of frequency in Table 4. The top three national issues identified by economically disadvantaged young people were *mental health*, *alcohol and drugs* and *equity and discrimination*. These were the same top three issues for respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work; however, economically disadvantaged young people reported lower levels of concern about *mental health* and *equity and discrimination*. In contrast, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated *employment* was an important issue in Australia (12.6% compared with 7.7%).

Table 4: Most important issues in Australia today

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Mental health	36.6	44.0
Alcohol and drugs	30.3	28.6
Equity and discrimination	15.8	23.9
Bullying	15.9	17.4
Crime, safety and violence	13.6	13.5
The economy and financial matters	12.5	11.4
Employment	12.6	7.7
Homelessness/housing	9.4	9.0
Health	9.2	11.7
The environment	8.6	9.3

Note: Items are listed in order of frequency amongst economically disadvantaged respondents.

Figure 4: Issues of personal concern to young people



Note: Items are listed in order of frequency amongst economically disadvantaged respondents.

Where do young people go for help with important issues?

Young people were asked to indicate from a number of sources where they would go for help with important issues in their lives. *Friend/s*, *parent/s or guardian/s* and *relative/family friend* were the three most commonly cited sources of help for economically disadvantaged young people and for respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work.

However, as Table 5 below shows, economically disadvantaged young people were less likely to report that they would seek support from these three sources (77.8%, 66.0% and 55.8% compared with 85.2%, 76.9% and 60.1% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

In contrast, a much higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they would turn to a *community agency* for help with important

issues (19.6% compared with 12.7% of respondents with guardian/s in paid work).

Young people were also asked if there was anyone they felt they could turn to if they were in trouble or a crisis. The majority of respondents from both cohorts reported 'yes,' they did have someone to turn to in a crisis. However, a lower proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported 'yes', compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (80.6% compared with 91.6% respectively).

Nearly one in five (19.4%) economically disadvantaged young people reported 'no', they did not feel they had someone they could turn to if they were in trouble or a crisis.

This was more than double the proportion of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (19.4% compared with 8.4%).

Table 5: Where young people go for help with important issues

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Friend/s	77.8	85.2
Parent/s or guardian/s	66.0	76.9
Relative/family friend	55.8	60.1
GP or health professional	50.4	54.3
Brother/sister	49.1	53.5
Internet	44.0	49.9
Teacher	38.8	37.8
School counsellor	37.0	36.2
Community agency	19.6	12.7
Telephone hotline	16.4	17.3
Social media	14.8	14.6
Books/magazines	12.2	13.5

Note: Items are listed in order of frequency amongst economically disadvantaged respondents.

What activities are young people involved in?

Young people were asked to identify the activities that they have been involved in over the past year from the list of options shown in Table 6.

Economically disadvantaged young people indicated they took part in a wide range of activities over the past year; however, they reported a lower level of participation in most activities than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work.

Table 6 shows that much lower proportions of

economically disadvantaged young people took part in *sports (as a participant)* and *sports (as spectator)* (43.3% and 24.8% compared with 65.3% and 42.2% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). Lower proportions of economically disadvantaged young people were also involved in *volunteer work* and *student leadership activities* (29.0% and 20.1% respectively compared with 37.9% and 28.4% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Table 6: Activities young people were involved in over the past year

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Sports (as a participant)	43.3	65.3
Arts/cultural/music activities	32.8	37.0
Volunteer work	29.0	37.9
Sports (as a spectator)	24.8	42.2
Youth groups and activities	23.7	22.5
Student leadership activities	20.1	28.4
Religious groups/activities	18.1	19.0
Environmental groups/activities	11.2	11.1
Political groups/organisations	4.7	3.8

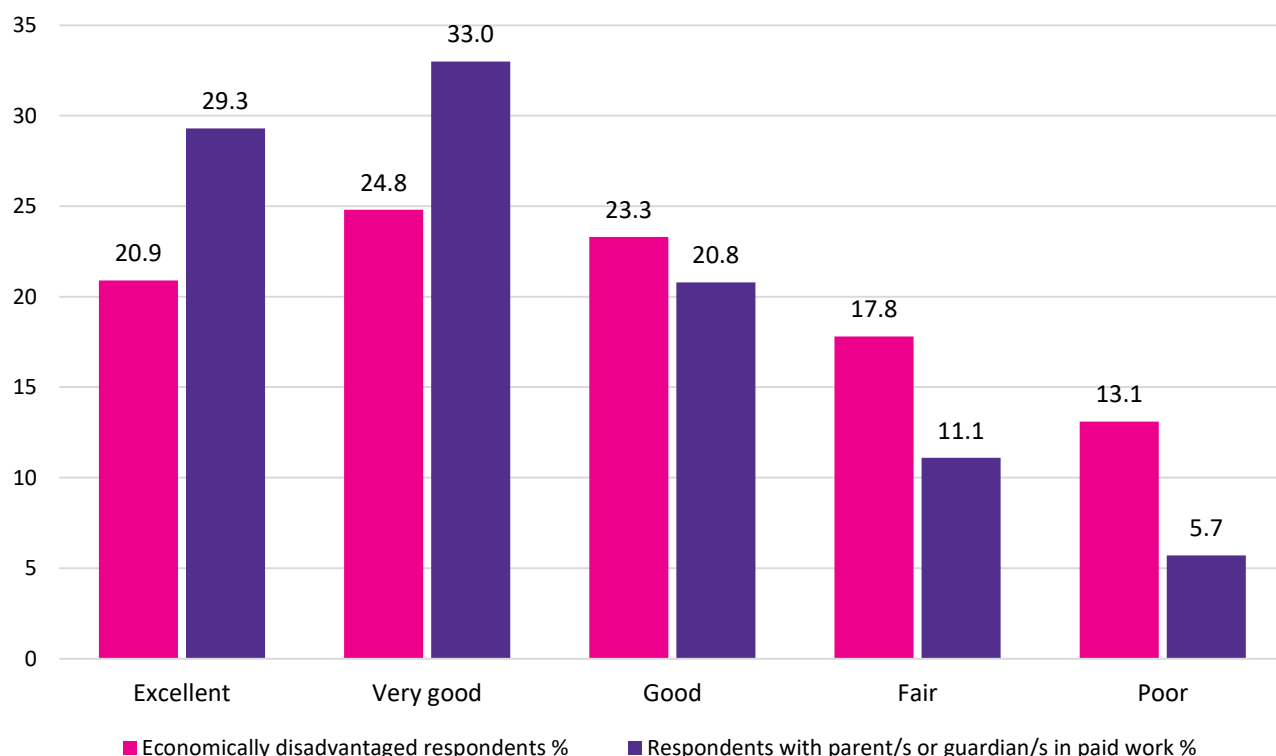
Note: Items are listed in order of frequency amongst economically disadvantaged respondents.

How well do young people feel their family gets along?

Young people were asked how well they felt their family gets along with one another. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale, ranging from *excellent* to *poor*. As shown in Figure 5, a much lower proportion of economically disadvantaged young people rated their family's ability to get along positively (45.7% *excellent/very good*, compared with 62.3% of

respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). Conversely, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people did not report such a positive experience of family relationships: three in ten economically disadvantaged young people rated their family's ability to get along as either *fair* or *poor* (30.9% compared with 16.8% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Figure 5: Family's ability to get along



Happiness, feelings about the future and control over life

Young people were asked to rate how happy they were with their life as a whole. As shown in Table 7, 46.3% of economically disadvantaged young people indicated that they felt *happy/very happy* with their lives overall. This was notably lower than the proportion of participants with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (63.5%).

Concerningly, more than double the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling *very sad/sad* with life as a whole (19.3% compared with 9.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Young people were also asked to rate how positive they felt about the future and to rate their response on a 5-point scale ranging from *very positive* to *very negative*. As shown in Table 8, more than half (51.4%) of economically disadvantaged young people indicated that they felt *very positive* or *positive* about the future.

Once again, this proportion was notably lower than the proportion of respondents with guardian/s in paid work (51.4% compared with 63.1% respectively). A higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling *negative* or *very negative* about the future (15.7% compared with 9.4% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Table 7: How happy young people are

	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Happy/Very happy (70-100)	46.3	63.5
Not happy or sad (40-60)	34.3	27.4
Very sad/Sad (0-30)	19.3	9.3

Table 8: Feelings about the future

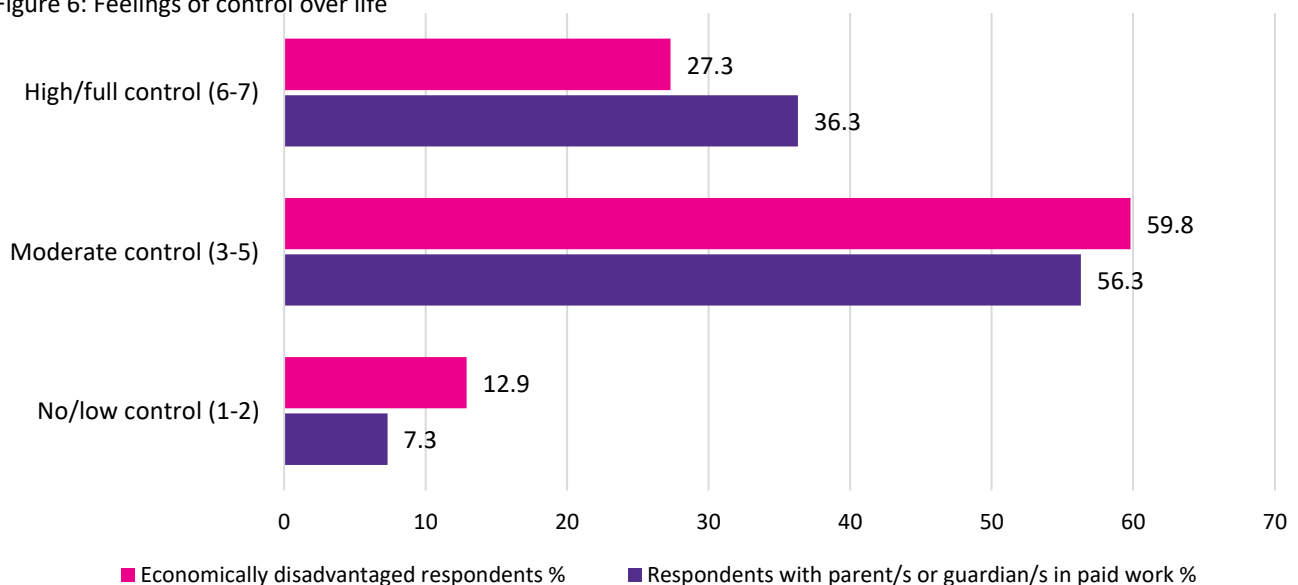
	Economically disadvantaged respondents %	Respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work %
Very positive	13.1	15.5
Positive	38.3	47.6
Neither positive nor negative	32.9	27.6
Negative	8.9	6.7
Very negative	6.8	2.7

The *Youth Survey 2018* also asked young people to rate how much control they feel they have over their life on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 represents *no control* and 7 represents *complete control*. As shown in Figure 6, respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work felt a greater sense of control over their lives than economically disadvantaged young people (36.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s

in paid work indicated *high/full control* compared with 27.3% respectively).

Conversely, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling that they had *no/low control* over their lives (12.9% compared with 7.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Figure 6: Feelings of control over life



Implications for policy and practice

This report highlights that economically disadvantaged young people face many of the same challenges to their post-school transition and overall wellbeing as young people with parents and guardians in paid employment. However, these findings demonstrate that these challenges are more acute for economically disadvantaged young people, and their support systems to deal with these challenges are limited.

A cluster of major themes emerged from this report that have policy implications for young people and their families, including: post-school transitions; financial insecurity; participation and inclusion; and, mental health and wellbeing. These themes are discussed and key recommendations set out below.

Post-school transitions and economic disadvantage

The *Youth Survey* results highlight that economically disadvantaged young people are at an increased risk of disengagement and face particular challenges around their transition from school into future study or work.

A lower proportion of economically disadvantaged young people were studying full-time (85.0% compared with 94.8% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). Economically disadvantaged young people were less likely to report that they were *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with their studies (61.6% compared with 69.4%) and were less confident in their ability to achieve their post-school goals (14.5% reporting they were *slightly* or *not at*

all confident compared with 9.6%). Additionally, the proportion of those not planning to complete Year 12 was more than double that of respondents with guardian/s in paid employment (7.3% compared with 3.4%).

These figures indicate that economically disadvantaged young people are at higher risk of educational disengagement than young people who have a parent or guardian in paid work. It is important to have programs in place for those at risk or who have already disengaged from school, to support their pathway into future work or study and models that have demonstrated success should be more widely implemented such as the Flexible Learning Options model in South Australia that was recently evaluated by the University of Adelaide.⁵¹

⁵¹ University of Adelaide 2018. See also Mission Australia 2018

Flexible Learning Options (SA)

Flexible Learning Options (FLO) provides casework support and an individualised and flexible learning programs for students aged 13-19, young parents and young people with disabilities up to 25 years who have disengaged with mainstream schooling. FLO provides a flexible, safe and supportive learning space that helps to foster feelings of independence, security and tolerance amongst students. Students are given the space to mature within the program free from the pressures that initially drove them to disconnect with mainstream schooling.

The Mission Australia FLO Program has run in South Australia since 2007 and currently supports more than 500 students across 32 different schools through nine different Flexible Learning Centres in Northern Adelaide, Southern Adelaide and the Riverland.

An independent evaluation was completed in 2018 that demonstrated the significant and positive impact of the Mission Australia FLO program on the lives of the students. In many instances FLO attendance was described by students as being personally transformative, potentially life-saving and a significant driver of re-engagement and social inclusion. As a result of attending the program and the casework support received, the evaluation showed the majority of FLO students are able to identify educational or job-related goals, as well as discover their ambitions and put strategies in place to achieve them. The co-location of FLO caseworkers with FLO teachers at Flexible Learning Centres as well as close and frequent contact between schools, FLO coordinators and caseworkers was identified as vital to the program's success.

Navigator (VIC)

Navigator is a Victorian Government initiative that provides support for disengaged young people, aged 12-17 years, to re-engage with an education or training pathway.

Navigator services seek out disengaged learners and actively work with them and their support networks, providing the support required for a successful return to education.

Mission Australia is the lead provider of this service in Victoria's Bayside Peninsula.

Post-school transitions (cont.)

The aspiration levels for economically disadvantaged young people's post-school pathways were also generally lower than those of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment. Half (50.3%) of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they planned to *go to university* after finishing school. However, this proportion was notably lower than that of respondents with a parent or guardian in paid work (68.0%). This may be due to a range of factors, including financial difficulties.

Undergraduate financial hardship scholarships should be expanded and Youth Allowance payments increased to support economically disadvantaged students to access and complete higher education. Entry options for economically disadvantaged young people, especially those who did not complete high school, could also be expanded to provide opportunities to enter into higher education.

Post-school transitions (cont.)

The *Youth Survey* results showed that higher proportions of economically disadvantaged young people reported plans to *go to TAFE or college* (20.2% compared with 13.5% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work) and to *get an apprenticeship* (12.1% compared with 8.6%).

While it is encouraging to see many economically disadvantaged young people opting for an apprenticeship or further training at TAFE, young people may face challenges entering the vocational education sector, including financial and geographical constraints. Access to fee-free or financial hardship scholarships should be expanded for TAFE, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and apprenticeships to support economically disadvantaged young people to engage in these pathways. Support for economically disadvantaged young people to stay engaged in vocational education is also required and successful programs should be rolled out nationally.

Although over four in ten (42.7%) economically disadvantaged young people felt *extremely/very confident* in their ability to achieve their post-school aspirations, more than four in ten economically disadvantaged young people also felt only *somewhat confident* (42.8%). Of particular concern is that 2.5% of economically disadvantaged young people felt they had no options available to them after school (compared with 0.6% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

Additional investment in appropriate supports to assist young people successfully transition into work or further study should be targeted to assisting the most disadvantaged young people.

Try, Test and Learn – Support for VET Students (SA)

This service model aims to support students at risk of disengaging with post-secondary VET studies to stay engaged and complete their education/ training, resulting in increasing their likelihood of future employment. Objectives of the service include:

- Improved engagement, attendance and attainment in education
- Increased educational completion
- Improved engagement in the pursuit of employment
- Increased employment
- Faster pace of transition to employment
- Improved social connection and support networks

The program also focuses on early intervention by using risk factors to identify students, helping them connect to available supports to reduce risks, and maintaining a relationship so that support can be offered quickly to resolve and stabilise escalating issues before students disengage. Existing and local services are drawn on to support participants wider and complex needs.

Synergy Auto Repairs (VIC)

Synergy Auto Repairs is a social enterprise based in North Melbourne that offers customers a full suite of smash repair services, while providing a flexible accredited training program and support for young people aged 16-20 with a history of motor vehicle related offences. The program harnesses participants' interest in cars and aims to help them build a career in a field that matches their interests. The social enterprise equips participants with the skills to commence a smash repairs apprenticeship. The initiative is an Australian-first partnership between Mission Australia, the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council (NMVTRC), Kangan TAFE, and Suncorp Group.

An independent evaluation of the success and efficiency of the program after two years found:⁵²

- All young participants agreed that Synergy has given them a strong basis from which to grow the skills needed to make them employable within the automotive industry.
- The program is innovative and has the opportunity to offer long-term positive outcomes to young people, with the aim of helping get young people 'back on track'.
- Both the participants and staff felt that the Synergy program had a transformative effect on the young people who participated.

Barriers to finding work

The *Youth Survey* results show that although a much smaller proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported that they were working part-time (25.8% compared with 43.7% of respondents with guardian/s in paid work), a greater proportion of economically disadvantaged young people were looking for work (45.8% compared with 33.7% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

These young people may be experiencing difficulties securing employment for a variety of reasons. Indeed, a much higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated that they felt there were barriers impacting upon them finding work (51.9% compared with 38.0% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment).

Economically disadvantaged young people reported *lack of skills/experience* (19.2%) and *lack of jobs* (19.1%) were barriers to finding work in higher proportions than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (14.4% and 11.9% respectively). In light of this finding, more must be done to comprehensively train and mentor economically disadvantaged young people through school-to-work pathways.

'More jobs need to be available for young people, employers need to be open to hiring young people for experience (since some jobs require experience to even be hired)'

(F, 19, TAS)

⁵² Thielking et al. 2016

Transition to Work (NSW, VIC, SA)

The Transition to Work program focuses on young people aged 15-21 who are facing barriers to enter the workforce to pursue employment or further education. Youth Employment Specialists assist young people in the development of practical skills, connection with education or training providers, engagement with work-experience opportunities and local community services, as well as identifying job opportunities to suit their aspirations and skill set and the needs of the local job market. By intervening early to help young people stay in school, engage in training or find work, we can set them up for a better future.

Barriers to finding work (cont.)

While the Transition to Work program has been able to provide some young people with specialist supports, there remains a significant service gap for the majority of Stream C job seekers who are ineligible for the Transition to Work program. These are the most disadvantaged young people in our community who have tremendous potential with the right supports to engage with education and work.

Investment in youth employment programs should be targeted to the most disadvantaged young job seekers and to those programs demonstrated to be effective in assisting young people transition from education to training and employment. The principles underlying these programs should incorporate a holistic, strengths-based approach and where necessary, have the flexibility to work with young people's families. Such programs should include careers advice, mentoring, skills training, assistance to re-engage with education and work experience as well as working on underlying issues that present as barriers to employment.

Additionally, economic development opportunities and partnerships between business and community

could be expanded to offer more job opportunities in local areas and to support young people in their skill development. Promoting economic development in local communities would mutually benefit community, business, young people, and their families.

Increased localised job opportunities may also lessen the challenges that economically disadvantaged young people can experience around job accessibility and transport. Nearly one in six (15.7%) economically disadvantaged young people reported that *transport* was a barrier impacting upon them finding work, compared with just over one in ten (11.5%) respondents with a parent or guardian in paid work.

The cost of transport is often higher for low-income households due to living further from work and major services, which can result in increased fuel costs or public transport charges, in addition to the potential for greater costs of maintaining and running older cars, which economically disadvantaged households are more likely to own.⁵³

⁵³ Bowman and Banks 2018, 10

Barriers to finding work (cont.)

Parents not in paid work may also not be in the financial position to own a car, or they may not have a license to drive. This may impact young people's immediate access to jobs and also act as a barrier to young people learning to drive. Support to obtain a driver's license can improve the range of jobs available to young people.

Without access to a car, this leaves public transport as the only option for economically disadvantaged young people to access jobs and training. Public transport services however, remain patchy for lower socioeconomic regions and may not be a viable option for commuting. Improved public transport services in lower socioeconomic areas would assist young people to access work and education opportunities. Improved transport concessions and subsidies for young people seeking work would also help to overcome this barrier. Even relatively low costs to access public transport can be a barrier for young people who have little or no disposable income and do not want to risk fines.

Learner to Permit (VIC)

The L2P (Learner to Permit) program pairs young people with a volunteer mentor who assists them to learn to drive and build up their driving hours required to secure a license. It supports young people to achieve their working or education ambitions and targets Gippsland areas like Yarram, Sale, Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance and surrounds, where driving is essential for young people to get to work as public transport is lacking.

'Creating more jobs or more public transport to get jobs.'

(F, 18, WA)

Participation and inclusion

Lower proportions of economically disadvantaged young people took part in *sports (as a participant)* (43.3% compared with 65.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work) and *sports (as spectator)* (24.8% compared with 42.2%), as well as *volunteer work* (29.0% compared with 37.9%) and *student leadership activities* (20.1% compared with 28.4%).

It is concerning that economically disadvantaged

young people are missing out on extra-curricular activities. We know that fees and equipment costs can be a barrier to participation, as can the fact that the facilities themselves may be of a lower quality or too far away.⁵⁴

Participation in sport and cultural activities has been linked with positive development for young people, with those from disadvantaged backgrounds gaining special benefit.

⁵⁴ Stalsberg and Pedersen 2010; Skattebol et al. 2012

Participation and inclusion (cont.)

Research has demonstrated that it has a positive effect on young people's self-worth as well as their social and academic confidence.

A positive link between extracurricular activities and educational outcomes is also well established and activities which extend young people's awareness and promote the formation of broader social connections are more likely to assist with navigating employment pathways. Volunteering is particularly seen as a 'step-into' work as it provides experience of the work place and demonstrates work ethic.⁵⁵

Young people's participation in extra-curricular activities should be encouraged to build skills, networks and understanding of employment pathways. These activities allow young people to form social connections beyond their families and immediate peers which may foster later employment opportunities and are particularly beneficial for economically disadvantaged young people who report fewer sources of support. Financial barriers need to be addressed and community facilities and access improved in lower socioeconomic areas.

Financial insecurity and the impact upon families

The detrimental impacts of financial insecurity upon young people's transitions, wellbeing and education and work outcomes have been well demonstrated.⁵⁶ These *Youth Survey* results particularly point to the link between financial insecurities and impacts upon family relationships and young people's feelings of support within the family.

Economically disadvantaged young people were much more concerned about *financial security* than those young people with parents or guardians in paid work (27.3% compared with 15.8% respectively). Economically disadvantaged young people also reported much higher levels of concern about *family conflict* (24.7% compared with 17.1% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work) and *domestic/family violence* (14.2% compared with 9.2%).

Three in ten economically disadvantaged young

people reported that their family's ability to get along was either *fair* or *poor* (30.9% compared with 16.8% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). Further, economically disadvantaged young people were much more likely than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s with paid employment to report *lack of family support* was a barrier to both finding work (7.9% compared with 2.3% respectively) and to moving out of home in the future (17.6% compared with 9.9%).

These results draw attention to the impact of unemployment and economic disadvantage upon the whole family unit. Whole-of-family family interventions and improved holistic family support services are important in this context to strengthen family relationships and reduce conflict. Child, youth and family services should be integrated with Centrelink, employment services, financial

⁵⁵ Blomfield and Barber 2011; Skattebol et al. 2012.

⁵⁶ See the first section of this paper for further information.

Financial insecurity and the impact upon families (cont.)

counselling and other supports to provide soft entry points and holistic wrap around support as required.

Where parent/s and guardian/s who are not in paid work are receiving Newstart, the rates are inadequate to support families through tough difficult periods. More than half (55%) of the people on Newstart Allowance live below the poverty line and there is only 1 job available for every 8 people looking for paid work or more hours.⁵⁷

Newstart allowance should be increased to support job-seeking families and reduce the stressors of financial insecurity. There is a strong evidence base to support a \$75 per week increase to Newstart to boost the wellbeing and financial security of economically disadvantaged people and families and reduce entrenched poverty.⁵⁸

.....

Economic disadvantage takes a variety of forms and the findings in this report highlight that a higher proportion of young people who reported that neither parent/guardian was in paid employment indicated they were also living with a disability. One in eight economically disadvantaged young people were living with a disability (12.2%), which was double that of the cohort of respondents with guardian/s in paid employment (6.0%). This indicates that many guardians may play a caring role, which in turn may impact upon their ability to participate in the workforce.⁵⁹

A higher proportion of respondents who identified that neither parent or guardian was in paid employment also reported that they were born overseas (21.3% compared with 14.3% of respondents with guardian/s in paid work), and additionally a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they spoke a language other than English at home (28.1% compared with 18.6% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment). New migrants often face challenges securing ongoing employment; even for those migrants who arrive with qualifications and skills via the Australian Skilled Migration Program.⁶⁰

More tailored employment supports are required to meet the needs of parents who are locked out of paid work and address underlying barriers. This should be an empowering approach and include career counselling, support for education and training and appropriately paid work experience. Employment supports also need to be tailored to meet the needs of parents with caring responsibilities and of migrants and refugees as well as other groups with particular needs.

Improved support for parent/s and guardian/s to secure ongoing work will have a positive impact on family relationships and young people's sense of support and confidence. While parents are not in paid work, income support must be adequate to meet basic family needs.

⁵⁷ Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2019

⁵⁸ Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2019. See also the report released on modelling for the increase to Newstart

payments in Australia: Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2018. See also Saunders and Bedford 2017

⁵⁹ Matthews et al. 2018, 2

⁶⁰ Tahiri 2017; Birrell 2018; Acharya 2018

Mental health and wellbeing

The *Youth Survey* results paint a picture of the particular challenges that economically disadvantaged young people face around their mental health, resilience, and wellbeing.

Economically disadvantaged young people reported a higher level of personal concern about a range of issues that each impact upon mental health.

Compared with respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work, higher proportions of economically disadvantaged respondents indicated they were *extremely/very concerned* about *family conflict* (24.7% compared with 17.1%), *discrimination* (16.1% compared with 10.3%), *domestic/family violence* (14.2% compared 9.2%), *bullying/emotional abuse* (20.0% compared with 15.4%) and *suicide* (20.2% compared with 15.4%).

Although only a marginally higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling *extremely/very concerned* about *mental health* (33.5% compared with 31.0% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work), economically disadvantaged young people were more likely than respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work to cite *mental health* as a barrier to finding work (13.8% compared with 7.3% respectively).

Economically disadvantaged young people also reported lower levels of overall wellbeing than their counterparts with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work did. More than double the proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they felt *very sad/sad* with life overall (19.3% compared with 9.3% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). Additionally, a higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people reported feeling *negative/very negative* about the future (15.7% compared with 9.4% of

respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work). Further, these *Youth Survey* findings revealed that economically disadvantaged young people did not experience the same level of support to deal with important issues as respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid employment. The findings highlight that economically disadvantaged young people were less likely to report that they would seek support from their *friend/s*, *parent/s or guardian/s*, or a *relative/family friend* (77.8%, 66.0% and 55.8% compared with 85.2%, 76.9% and 60.1% of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work).

It is encouraging to see that a much higher proportion of economically disadvantaged young people indicated they would turn to a community agency for help with important issues (19.6% compared with 12.7% of respondents with guardian/s in paid work). However, nearly one in five (19.4%) economically disadvantaged young people felt they did not have someone they could turn to if they were in trouble or a crisis: more than double the proportion of respondents with parent/s or guardian/s in paid work (19.4% compared with 8.4%). These results indicate that economically disadvantaged young people require a range of supports, both formal and informal, to build their resilience and work through their wellbeing concerns.

Informal mentoring programs that help to build young people's soft skills (such as communication, self-esteem, collaboration and confidence) should be expanded to strengthen resilience and coping strategies. Youth outreach and drop-in centres should be expanded to provide economically disadvantaged young people with safe spaces, where mentors and youth workers can offer informal support and advise on formalised service pathways as necessary.

Mental health and wellbeing (cont.)

Youth workers can also work with young people to nurture their network of safe friends and family.

We cannot expect young people to navigate post-school pathways and the challenges of adolescence without support. For those young people who are reliant on the support of community agencies, access requirements should not be so bureaucratic as to form a barrier to support and providing after-hours access to support is crucial.

Youth services should be co-designed with young people and ongoing feedback sought on how such services can work better to meet young people's needs. Young people's voice should also be sought in the design of other community supports that interact with youth programs.

Youthbeat (TAS)

The Youthbeat outreach program is a trusted presence that provides support to young people on the streets in some of Hobart's most disadvantaged areas. Youthbeat provides support, information and referrals to services and provides safety, information and guidance for young people at risk as well as connecting them with community services, family and peers. Youthbeat's vans are manned by professional youth workers who are trained to manage challenging behaviours, alcohol and drug-fuelled incidents and support young people experiencing homelessness. Youthbeat helps young people to become strong, healthy adults who actively participate in community life.



Policy recommendations

- Effective educational engagement and alternative education programs should be expanded for young people at risk of disengaging or who have already disengaged from school, to support their pathway into future work or study.
- Financial barriers to accessing university, TAFE and other training programs need to be addressed and supports put in place for ongoing engagement for economically disadvantaged young people.
- Investment in youth employment programs should be targeted and tailored to the most disadvantaged young job seekers and to those programs demonstrated to be effective in assisting young people transition from education to training and employment.
- Economic development opportunities and partnerships between business and community could be expanded to offer more job opportunities in local areas and to support young people in their skill development.
- Greater efforts are needed to overcome a lack of transport as a barrier to young people finding work including programs to assist young people to obtain a driving license and improved access to and availability of public transport in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.
- Young people's participation in extra-curricular activities should be facilitated and encouraged to build skills, networks and understanding of employment pathways. Financial barriers need to be addressed and community facilities improved in lower socioeconomic areas.
- Improved employment supports are required for parents and guardians in economically disadvantaged families to secure work which will have a positive impact on family relationships and young people's sense of agency and confidence.
- While parents are not in paid work, income support must be adequate to meet basic family needs. Rates of Newstart and Youth Allowance need to be increased to reduce the stress that financial insecurity places on family life.
- Youth friendly programs and safe spaces should be facilitated and expanded as soft entry points to help young people to build their resilience and confidence.
- Youth services should be co-designed with young people and young people's voice should be included in the development of local community services and programs.

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'Employers need to be more open to younger people with limited experience who are willing to learn. I come from a single income family and my child support stops this year. If I can't find a job my family will suffer.'

(F, 18, NSW)

'Family conflict. More talks in schools, more advertisements against family conflict, better education for students and places to go for help.'

(M, 17, VIC)

'Financial instability of my family. Get a job to start financially supporting myself, even if it's just a little.'

(F, 15, NSW)

'Workplaces should offer more chances for inexperienced young people.'

(M, 18, NSW)

'Create more jobs for young people and more work experience/ volunteering opportunities.'

(F, 16, NSW)

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