

# ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

## MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED UNTIL WEDNESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2023

### ***New report finds education is an important step in reducing rates of Gender-Based Violence***

**A study commissioned by Australia's leading independent research organisation on Women's Safety (ANROWS) has found early intervention in education settings is a crucial step to help end the cycle of gender-based violence (GBV).**

This timely new research reveals that a comprehensive social and emotional learning and respectful relationships education program can improve social wellbeing and decrease bullying and sexual harassment among high school students.

#### **Key findings:**

- Early and consistent intervention in the education sector is an important step in addressing gender-based violence as research suggests that support for gender equality declines with age.
- The implementation of the 'Resilience Rights and Respectful Relationships' (RRRR) program in secondary schools led to a decrease in bullying and sexual harassment among high school students from 11.8% to 10.3% and 8.7% to 5.9% respectively.
- Students who participated in the program valued the relationship-centric focus and the opportunity to develop their capacity for positive relationships with peers.
- When the program was taught as designed it led to improvements in resilience as well as reductions in gender-based violence.

Led by Emeritus Professor Helen Cahill, this new study found that Year 9 boys were less confident than Year 7 boys about whether to intervene in cases of sexual harassment, with the intention to intervene falling from 20.2% to 12.8%. Overall girls and gender diverse young people were more likely to say they would intervene than boys.

The aim of this research was to increase our understanding of where the greatest challenges are and to help guide educators, parents, policy makers, young people, and the public on the importance of improving mental health and respectful relationships.

When speaking of his experience with the RRRR program, one Year 7 male student noted, “It’s going to help me in my life because I’m someone who’s peer pressured a lot...it helps me stand up for myself and not let people tell me what to do.”

Professor Cahill notes, “The decline in mental health, and the increased rates of sexual harassment as students move into adolescence highlights the need to ensure that social and emotional learning and respectful relationships education starts in primary school and extends throughout the high school years”.

The study also found that the RRRR program was successful in improving student wellbeing, behaviour, and attitudes. Students found the program useful and appreciated how it integrated social and emotional learning and consent education into the school curriculum.

And while the program was well received by most students, boys in particular spoke to the importance of understanding emotions and the interplay with masculinity. “In real life it’s very hard to be a male and ask for help, because there’s a lot of stereotypes behind being tough,” a Year 9 male student said.

The key findings of the research add to a growing evidence base highlighting the need to equip and empower young people with the skills and resilience they need in age-appropriate ways.

Teachers who were involved with the implementation of the RRRR program felt they were given strong guidance on how to have collaborative discussions with their students. They found the learning activities enabled critical reflection on gender norms and positive approaches to consent conversations, peer support and help-seeking skills.

Importantly, the study found that there are solutions available and research-informed prevention education such as this RRRR program can help, with participating students showing an increased capacity for understanding the perspectives of others, and improved social engagement.

Supported by world-class research, the report makes a number of recommendations, including setting a clear policy agenda, providing teachers with research-informed resources, space in the curriculum, professional learning and leadership support. Collectively, these recommendations will help strengthen school-based provision, and give young people the right tools to navigate the complex world of social relationships.

Acting ANROWS CEO, Jane Lloyd, notes that the “research highlights that respectful relationship programs work. What is needed now is a consistent national approach. Schools and teachers are asking for support to enable them to play their vital role in preventing violence against women. This research provides the evidence that these programs work and need to be widely implemented”.

The report will be launched at 4pm Wednesday 15 November in an online webinar.

To read the Summary report visit: <https://www.anrows.org.au/publication/respectful-relationships-research-report/respectful-relationships-summary-report/>

ANROWS is Australia's leading independent research organisation established to produce evidence to support the reduction of violence against women and their children in Australia.

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## About ANROWS

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited ([ANROWS](#)) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation.

ANROWS is an initiative of Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia.

## Rates of sexual violence among young people

In 2023, high rates of sexual violence continue to permeate Australian society. One in five women (22%) and one in sixteen men (6.1%) have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 (ABS, 2023). A third of young people aged 14 to 18 years who had been in a relationship experienced some form of intimate partner abuse (Daff et al., 2021).

Australia's young people also struggle with increasing rates of mental health distress, with females and gender diverse young people carrying a higher burden of distress than males. A 2022 survey of 15 to 19-year-olds showed that 65.9 per cent of gender diverse young people, close to half of females (45.8%) and just over a fifth of males (21.5%) were very or extremely concerned about their mental health (Leung et al., 2022).