

Focus needed on youth mental health

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There is a need for on-going youth mental health monitoring and interventions, given a small decline in aspects of self-reported mental health among New Zealand secondary school students.

That was the conclusion from a study by University of Auckland researchers into rates of youth [mental health](#) self-reporting changes between 2007 and 2012.

The study team led by a senior lecturer in Paediatrics, Dr Terry Fleming, examined data from an earlier Youth12 survey of 8500 [secondary school students](#). This particular study looked at student well-being, symptoms of depression, periods of low moods, suicidal ideation or attempts, and deliberate self-harm.

"It shows that the mental health of secondary school students in New Zealand does require further attention," says Dr Fleming. "There is also a need for ongoing monitoring and for interventions that promote wellbeing and prevent [mental ill health](#)."

"Consistent with previous research, we report higher rates of emotional symptoms among females and older students," says Dr Fleming.

"Overall, the mental wellbeing of students appears to have deteriorated slightly with small increases in significant depressive symptoms, periods of low mood, emotional symptoms, deliberately self-harming, experiencing hyperactivity and suffering from peer problems."

"Fewer students reported conduct problems in 2012," says Dr Fleming.

"There have been no substantial changes to self-reported suicide ideation or attempts since 2007."

Changes in mental health indicators were similar for male and female students, older and younger students, and according to other demographic features such as ethnicity, locale and deprivation.

"This study shows a possible decline, or in a conservative interpretation, a lack of improvement in secondary school students' reports of mental health symptoms," she says. "New Zealand has made substantial gains in areas of youth substance use and driving. Teenagers are now less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol or smoke marijuana and less likely to drink and drive than they were in 2007."

"We have seen massive improvements in motor vehicle crash deaths. Now the challenge is to improve [youth mental health](#)," she says.

Provided by University of Auckland

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