

Young Aussie women now fatter but fitter

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Young Australian women are fatter, fitter and more frazzled today than they were nearly 20 years ago, according to Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health researchers.

The 17-year study has found that 70 per cent of women aged 18 to 23 met Australian guidelines for physical activity in 2010, compared with 59 per cent in 1996.

The study is led by The University of Queensland's Professor Gita Mishra and The University of Newcastle's Professor Julie Byles.

Professor Mishra said the finding was encouraging, but the percentage of overweight and obese [young women](#) was increasing.

"In 2013, 33 per cent of the young women surveyed were overweight or obese, compared with 20 per cent in 1996," she said.

Professor Byles said researchers also found the prevalence of stress in this age group was higher than in those surveyed in 1996.

She said about half the young women surveyed said they had experienced high or very high psychological stress in the past year.

"The rate was even higher – 55 per cent – for women aged 18 to 20, which probably reflects the stressful transition period between adolescence and young adulthood," Professor Byles said.

"Worryingly, we also found that 59 per cent of these young women had experienced suicidal thoughts in the past year, while 45 per cent had engaged in self-harming behaviour."

Other notable findings in the report, Health and wellbeing of women aged 18 to 23 in 2013 and 1996: Findings from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, include:

- More than one in five young women reported frequent severe tiredness, back pain, headache or period pain.

- One in four reported trouble sleeping – double the incidence reported in 1996.
- About one in three had low iron levels.
- One in 25 had asthma.

Smoking: From 1996 to 2013, the percentage of women aged 18 to 23 who had never smoked increased from 53 per cent to 63 per cent, and there was a substantial decline in current smokers, from one in three (32 per cent) to less than one in five (19 per cent).

Alcohol: In 2013, one in four young women (26 per cent) drank alcohol weekly or more frequently (compared with 29 per cent in 1996). There was little change in drinking patterns since the 1996 survey.

Violence: One in five young women had experienced physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months while 56 per cent had experienced either form of violence at some point in their lives.

Bullying: One in five young women said they were bullied in the previous 12 months, while 70 per cent had been bullied at some point in their lives.

Intimate partner violence: The percentage of women who had been in a violent relationship had increased to 13 per cent in 2013, from 11 per cent in 1996.

Impact of education: Women with less than a Year 12 education fared worse in almost all categories surveyed – reporting poorer mental health; higher incidence of being bullied; more likely to have experienced [intimate partner violence](#); more likely to have not used contraception and been pregnant at some stage; less likely to have received the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination.

More information: The study data is available online:
www.alswh.org.au/how-to-access-the-data/alswh-data

Provided by University of Queensland

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