



LONGITUDINAL SURVEYS OF AUSTRALIAN YOUTH

Doing well: helping young people achieve their potential

NCVER



INTRODUCTION

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY) Program follows young people from the ages of 15 to 25 as they move through school to further study and work. The study began in 1995, and since then four groups or 'cohorts' of young people have participated in the survey, with the latest one beginning in 2009. Over 20 000 students make up the combined cohorts, giving us rich and varied information about young people over a significant period of time. Because, unlike most surveys, the same people give their feedback year after year, researchers can get a clearer picture of trends emerging in how young people make the transition between school and further study and work. These trends inform those who devise education and employment policy and programs for young people.

The key focus for LSAY is the transition from youth to adulthood. Questions in the survey and consequent research cover a wide range of issues about how young people experience school and life after school: student achievement, aspirations and retention; social background, attitudes to school and work experience; and experience of the VET sector; higher education, job-seeking and employment once they leave school.

Some of the questions asked in the surveys also allow investigation of other topics such as wellbeing and social capital

for young people. This flyer summarises research into how these concepts are measured, as well as on pathways from school to work; 'at risk' youth; and the effect of combining school and part-time work.

WELLBEING

What do we mean by the term 'wellbeing'? It is not the same thing as good physical health: rather, wellbeing reflects the young person's sense of self, how they interact in their community, and how their social circumstances affect their ability to be happy and productive. The concept has two main dimensions: the social and the psychological. The questions LSAY respondents answer allow us to measure social, material and career wellbeing, but the surveys do not capture the psychological aspect: issues such as resilience, self-esteem and self-efficacy.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Another multi-dimensional concept that is attracting policy interest is young people's social capital. Formal and informal networks and connections can have quite an influence on the transition from youth to adulthood; for example, strong connections at school with teachers and peers can translate into elevated aspirations and better academic performance, and community networks can influence subject choices and employment prospects. An analysis of LSAY data reveals that

within disadvantaged communities, school can have a greater influence than family on successful transitions.

PATHWAYS

LSAY research has some clear messages about young people's pathways. Generally, it is no longer enough just to complete Year 12: young people need to pursue further study to put them on the path to success. For young men it appears they have more choices, with those attracted to doing an apprenticeship after Year 12 instead of going to university still achieving good results. Girls, on the other hand, generally do better if they complete Year 12 and follow this up by getting a university qualification.

AT RISK

Most young people manage the transition to adulthood well, although they may do so by taking circuitous routes. As many as a quarter experience a period of 'disengagement' at some point between the ages of 15 and 25 — when they are neither in full-time employment nor study — but this is not permanent, with most going on to full-time work or tertiary education. There is a small group who is disadvantaged or

'at risk', perhaps because they have poor literacy and numeracy skills, low socioeconomic status and no intention of completing Year 12. For this group, targeted early interventions to help them re-engage with study or part-time work may assist in making this a transitory state rather than permanent disengagement from the labour force and society.

COMBINING SCHOOL AND WORK

Does combining study and part-time work have a positive or negative effect on young people's prospects after school? On average, students who combine employment and study usually work around 11–12 hours a week which, analysis of LSAY data shows, is a healthy level of part-time work, and can develop skills and provide financial benefits. But if students do more than 12 hours a week it can have a negative effect on tertiary education rank (TER) scores. It may be the case that those who do work a lot of hours are signalling an intention to take up full-time work after school rather than study.

The LSAY website offers a wide range of publications and reports about each cohort, which provide vital data about how young people feel and think. Go to <http://www.lsay.edu.au> to access further information.

FURTHER READING

Anlezark, A 2011, *At risk youth: a transitory state?*, LSAY briefing paper 24, NCVET, Adelaide.

Anlezark, A & Lim, P 2011, *Does combining school and work affect school and post-school outcomes?*, NCVET, Adelaide.

Karmel, T & Liu, S-H 2011, *Which paths work for which young people?*, NCVET, Adelaide.

NCVET 2011, *Are we there yet? Making the successful transition to adulthood*, NCVET, Adelaide.

Polidano, C & Zakirova, R 2011, *Outcomes from combining work and tertiary study*, NCVET, Adelaide.

Semo, R 2011, *Social capital and young people*, NCVET, Adelaide.

Stanwick, J & Liu, S forthcoming, *An investigation of wellbeing questions in LSAY*, NCVET, Adelaide.



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