

Profiling the youth of today for a better tomorrow

University of Auckland researchers, in conjunction with government agencies, are assessing the health and well being of today's youth to help build a picture of current and emerging youth health issues.

The large, nationwide study, led by Dr Simon Denny from the University's Adolescent Health Research Group, will survey 10,000 secondary school students in 2007 using innovative web-based technology. The study, Youth'07, follows on from New Zealand's first ever national youth health survey undertaken in 2001 by the same research team, which covered a range of social and health issues. Youth'07 will be able to examine how these issues have changed over time. Youth'07 will also examine new and emerging youth health issues, such as obesity, text bullying, gambling and the use of methamphetamine (P).

Dr Denny says New Zealand has a poor youth health record, with rates of unintended pregnancy, suicide and self-harm that are amongst the highest in OECD countries.

"Overall, the aim is to collect information that is both accurate and up-to-date; that can be used to improve young people's health and wellbeing. We are incorporating some new and exciting strands to the project, for example, in recognition of young people spending a lot of time in school, we will be looking at school environments and what makes them 'healthy' places," he says.

Youth'07 will question students on a range of topics, including their ethnicity and culture, physical and emotional health, family and living arrangements, attitudes towards diet and physical activity and neighbourhood and community engagement.

The study will also survey students from Wharekura or Māori total immersion schools and use the same questions translated into te reo Māori.

The survey began with a pilot survey in August 2006. The actual survey will be held from mid to late 2007 and will involve 10,000 students from 100 randomly selected secondary schools. The pilot will involve staff and students from three secondary schools and one Wharekura in the Auckland/Waikato region. It will test the data collection method and the student and staff questionnaires.

New Nokia Internet Tablets will be used in the pilot survey and students will be introduced to an interactive kiwi that will help each student to navigate their way around an island displayed on the Nokia's screen. Each question will be displayed on the screen as well as read out over headphones. Answers are recorded by the Nokia's touch sensitive screen.

Dr Denny also hopes the tablets will motivate the students to participate in the survey and answer honestly and accurately.

"The use of web technology on the Nokias will help ensure participants feel their answers are confidential – and hence encourage them to answer truthfully," Dr Denny says.

"It is important that the questions are easy for the students to understand and that they are measuring what is intended for them to measure. The pilot will allow us to refine the questionnaire to make it understandable for the students and ensure we get the information that is meaningful."

The final results of the survey are expected to be released in late 2008.

This research is funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand, the Department of Labour, Families Commission, Accident Compensation Corporation, Sport and Recreation New Zealand, the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand and the Ministries of Youth Development, Justice and Health.



The Youth '07 Team (From left)
Dr Simon Denny, Tania Milne, Taciano Milfont,
Sue Grant and Ruth Herd

Key words:

- adolescent health, lifestyle, mental health.

Key facts:

- New Zealand has higher rates of youth suicide, teen pregnancy and adolescent injury than many OECD countries
- the 2002 National Children's Nutrition Survey estimated that more than one-third of young adolescents aged 11-14 years were overweight or obese
- alcohol is the most common substance used by NZ youth and binge drinking and prolonged alcohol use put youth at risk.

Aims of this research:

- to collect, analyse and disseminate accurate and comprehensive information to inform policies and practices to improve the health of New Zealand youth
- to identify the prevalence of risk and protective factors, with a focus on school environments, that promote the health and well-being of today's youth.

HRC68 2006

Level 3, 110 Stanley Street, Auckland PO Box 5541,
Wellesley Street, Auckland, NZ
Telephone 64 9 303 5200 Facsimile 64 9 377 9988
Website www.hrc.govt.nz

Health Research Council of New Zealand
Te Kaunihera Rangahau Hauora o Aotearoa

