



Preventing suicide:

THE VOICE OF CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Background, method
and description of
respondents



KidsHelpLine is a service of **yourtown**



yourtown

Some people may find the content of these papers distressing. If you start to feel distressed while reading, or you have been thinking about suicide, please talk to someone you trust or call a helpline.

• **Kids Helpline – for ages 5-25 to talk about anything at all**

24/7 phone counselling on 1800 55 1800 or WebChat between 8am and midnight at kidshelpline.com.au

• **Lifeline – all ages, for support in a personal crisis**

24/7 phone counselling on 13 11 14 or web chat between 7pm and 4am at lifeline.org.au

• **Suicide Call Back Service – for 15 years and over, support when you or someone you know is feeling suicidal**

24/7 phone counselling on 1300 659 467 or see suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Where to find more information:

• **Young people:**

kidshelpline.com.au, ReachOut.com and Youthbeyondblue.com have some great resources and information for young people who are going through tough times or feeling suicidal, and for young people concerned about a friend.

• **Adults:** You can read 'Suicide – The Facts' at

kidshelpline.com.au. beyondblue.org.au provide lots of information about anxiety, depression and suicide at any age. If you are a concerned

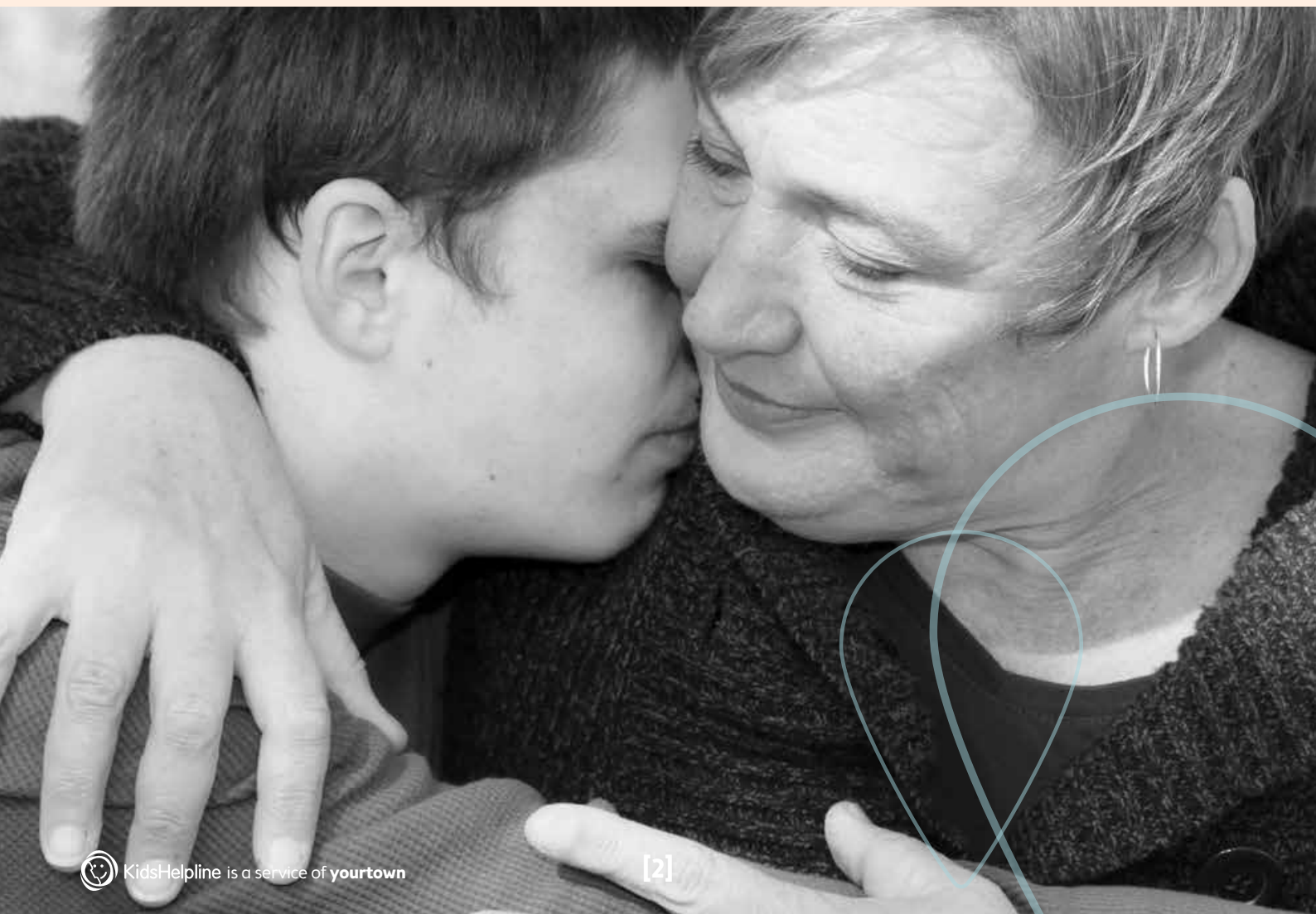
If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 000 for an ambulance.

parent, they have a family guide to youth suicide prevention.

ReachOut.com also has a parent site with information to help parents support their teenagers.

Conversationsmatter.com.au has tips for safe suicide discussions and other resources for both the general public and professionals.

Author: Dr Samantha Batchelor on behalf of **yourtown**, August 2016
T: 07 3368 3399
E: research@yourtown.com.au
yourtown.com.au
kidshelpline.com.au



INTRODUCTION

In 2014, 151 young people in Australia aged between 5 and 19 years died by suicide. Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people aged 12-25 years and suicide rates for children under the age of 14 are increasing.

Many organisations and individuals are working hard to understand what's happening for young people and develop strategies that will make a difference. As a service provider and advocate for young people, **yourtown** is committed to contributing to this work. In October 2015, we published a discussion paper that summarised existing knowledge about youth suicide, highlighted the unique experience of young people and raised a number of questions relevant to providing effective responses.

We strongly believe that the voice of young people needs to be heard, especially when it comes to national plans and policies that affect them. Consequently, we invited young people who had lived experience of feeling suicidal to contribute their views by sharing their experiences of seeking and receiving support when feeling suicidal.

Using an online survey on the Kids Helpline website and promoted through Facebook, 472 children, adolescents and young adults answered questions about how they got help when they were feeling suicidal, who helped them, which experiences were helpful and which weren't, and what advice they would like to give to other young people, families,

friends, and those who provide services for young people like them.

Children and young people want to have a voice: 472 took the time to share their experiences with us.

We believe this project to be unique. Researchers have typically collected information about the experiences of young people through focus groups and interviews. The use of an anonymous online survey enabled us to hear from the most marginalised young people, who may lack the confidence to share their experiences openly in a focus group or interview.

This paper provides a detailed description of the survey and the young people who responded. The findings from the consultation are described in four separate papers:

- Insights Part 1: Seeking and getting help.
- Insights Part 2: What helps and what doesn't.
- Insights Part 3: Messages for parents and carers.
- Insights Part 4: Implications for policy and practice.

These papers have been written for a general audience. We also hope to publish one or more academic papers in the future.

Thank you to all the young people who took the time to share their thoughts with us. Your insights were invaluable and are being shared with experts and decision-makers around Australia.

Children and young people want to have a voice: 472 took the time to share their experiences with us.

yourtown AND KIDS HELPLINE

Formerly BoysTown, **yourtown** has been supporting children, young people and their families since 1961. Our services include:

- Kids Helpline, a national 24/7 telephone and online counselling and support service for five to 25 year olds with special capacity for young people with mental health issues
- Parentline, a telephone counselling service for parents and carers in Queensland and the Northern Territory
- Family refuges
- Parenting and family support programs
- Training and employment services
- Work enterprises
- Indigenous employment and wellbeing services.

yourtown staff work with children and young people who are at risk of suicide every day, across

all these services, particularly Kids Helpline (KHL). In 2015, KHL received more than 7,500 contacts related to suicide, which constituted 11% of all counselling contacts.

- 77% were from young people experiencing suicidal thoughts
- 6% were from young people expressing an immediate intention to suicide
- 2% involved a current suicide attempt
- 14% were from young people concerned for another person, and
- 1% were seeking information about suicide.

In 2015, KHL initiated 568 emergency care actions related to suicide, an average of 11 per week. We also provided more than 1000 young people with ongoing counselling support associated with suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

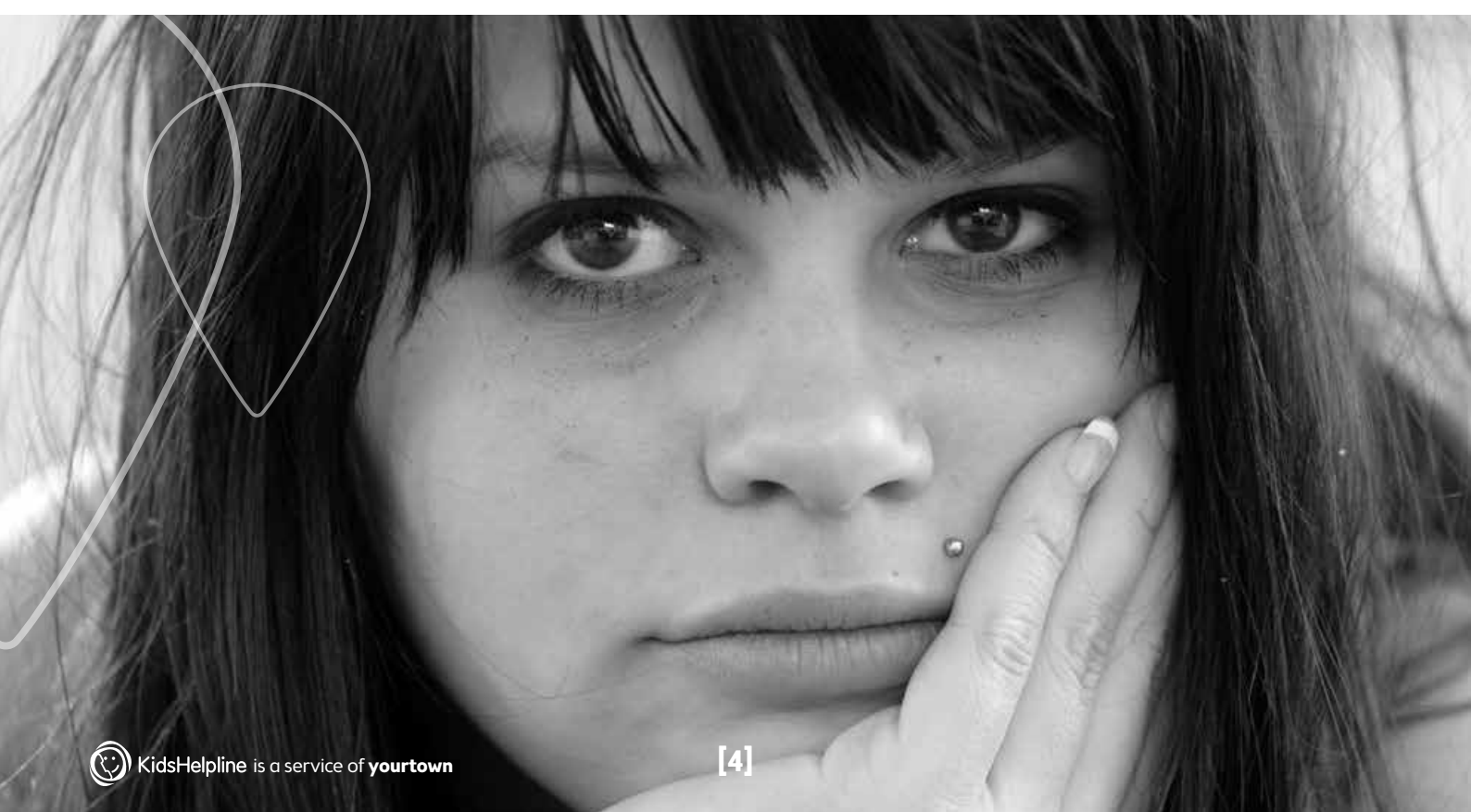
yourtown MISSION

To enable young people, especially those who are marginalised and without voice, to improve their quality of life.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Young people were consulted using an online survey, which was open from October 2015 to February 2016. The survey was promoted on the Kids Helpline website and through Facebook ads targeting 15-25 year olds. The ads invited any young person who had ever thought about taking their own life to participate.

A copy of the survey questions is included in Appendix A.



DESCRIPTION OF RESPONDENTS

Demographics

Between October 2015 and February 2016, 472 young people completed the online survey. Of these, 75% (n=354) were female, 16.7% (n=79) were male and 4.7% (n=22) identified as 'gender diverse' or 'other'. The remainder either did not respond to the question or 'preferred not to say'.

Of 414 who provided their age, one in five (n=99) was aged 13 years or younger, more than half (n=233) were aged between 14 and 19 years, and the remainder (n= 82) were young adults aged 20 or over.

Approximately 22% (n=103) of participants identified as LGBTIQ and a further 21% (n=99) preferred not to say. Those who preferred not to say tended to be in the younger age groups (almost half were aged 13 years and younger).

Thirty-four (7.1%) participants

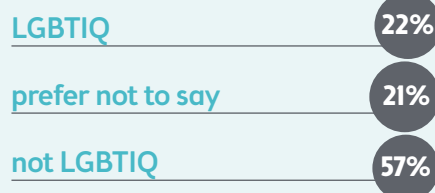
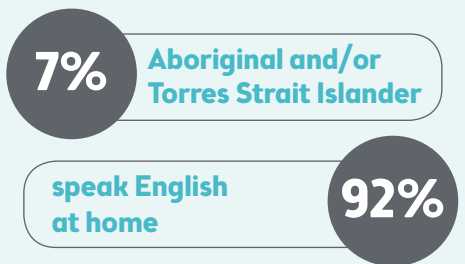
identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and 91.5% (n=432) said they speak English at home. Participants came from all over Australia, but most were from New South Wales (25%), Victoria (16.3%) and Queensland (15.9%).

A residential postcode was provided by 335 (71%) respondents. Of these, 73.1% (n=245) lived in major cities, 19.1% (n=64) lived in inner regional areas, and the remaining 7.8% (n=26) lived in outer regional and remote areas.

472 YOUNG PEOPLE COMPLETED THE ONLINE SURVEY.



75% Female
17% Male
5% Other
3% prefer not to say



Severity and recency of suicidality

Every young person who answered the survey had thought about suicide at some time in their life; this was a criterion for participation. As shown in Figure 1, 80% had made a plan of how to end their life and more than half had made a suicide attempt in the past. Of these, many experiences were recent: 77% had experienced suicidal thoughts, 52% had made a plan and 27% had made an attempt during the six months prior to completing the survey.

At the time of completing the survey, 32% of respondents described themselves as still thinking about suicide as much as ever, 48% said they felt “better than before,” but were still thinking

about suicide, and 20% reported that they no longer think about suicide.

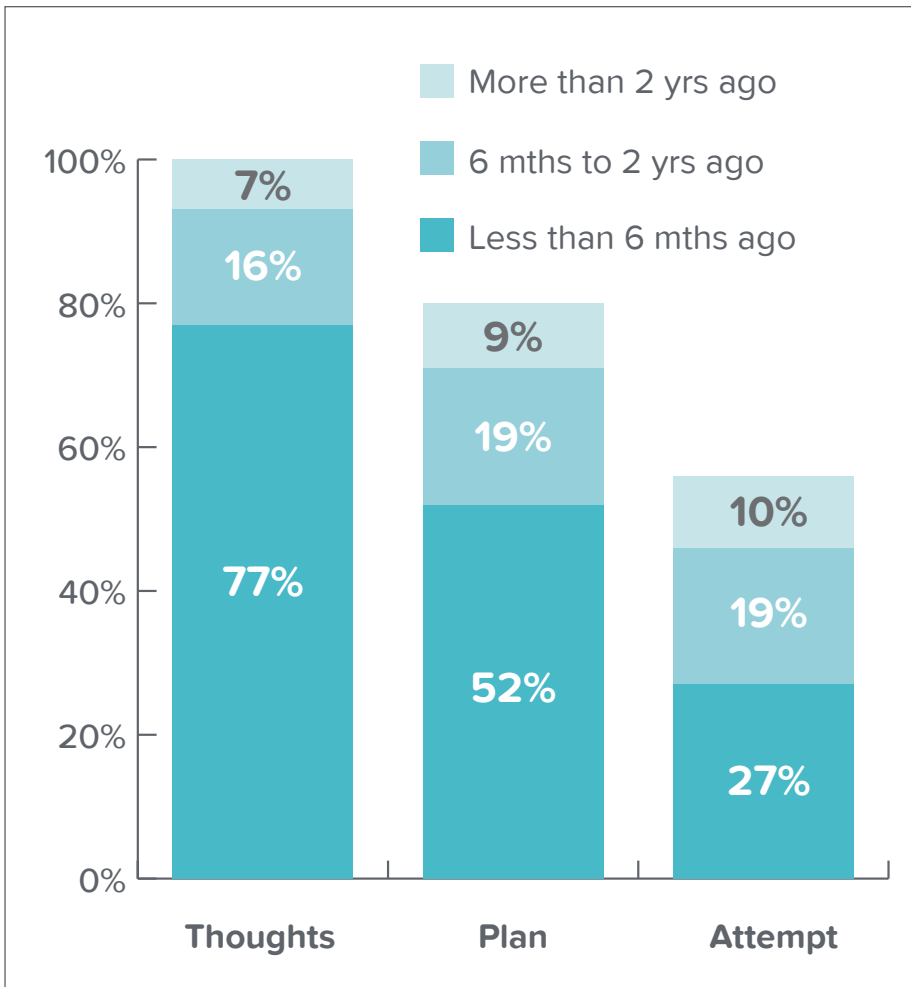
Some groups reported more severe suicidality than others. As shown in Figure 2, females were more likely to have made a suicide plan and suicide attempt than males and LGBTIQ participants were more likely to have made a plan or attempt than non-LGBTIQ participants. This is consistent with other research indicating that females make more suicide attempts than males (although males are more likely to die by suicide) and that LGBTIQ young people are at high risk for suicide. The likelihood of having made a suicide attempt also increased with age.

Limitations of the sample

Young people self-selected to complete the survey when they found it on the Kids Helpline website or saw a Facebook ad, which targeted young people aged 15 - 25 years. Although our respondents were diverse, the sample may not be representative of the population of suicidal young people in terms of background characteristics; hence, the data do not indicate the prevalence of suicidality in different groups (for example, the fact that 75% of respondents were female cannot be interpreted to mean that 75% of suicidal young people are female).

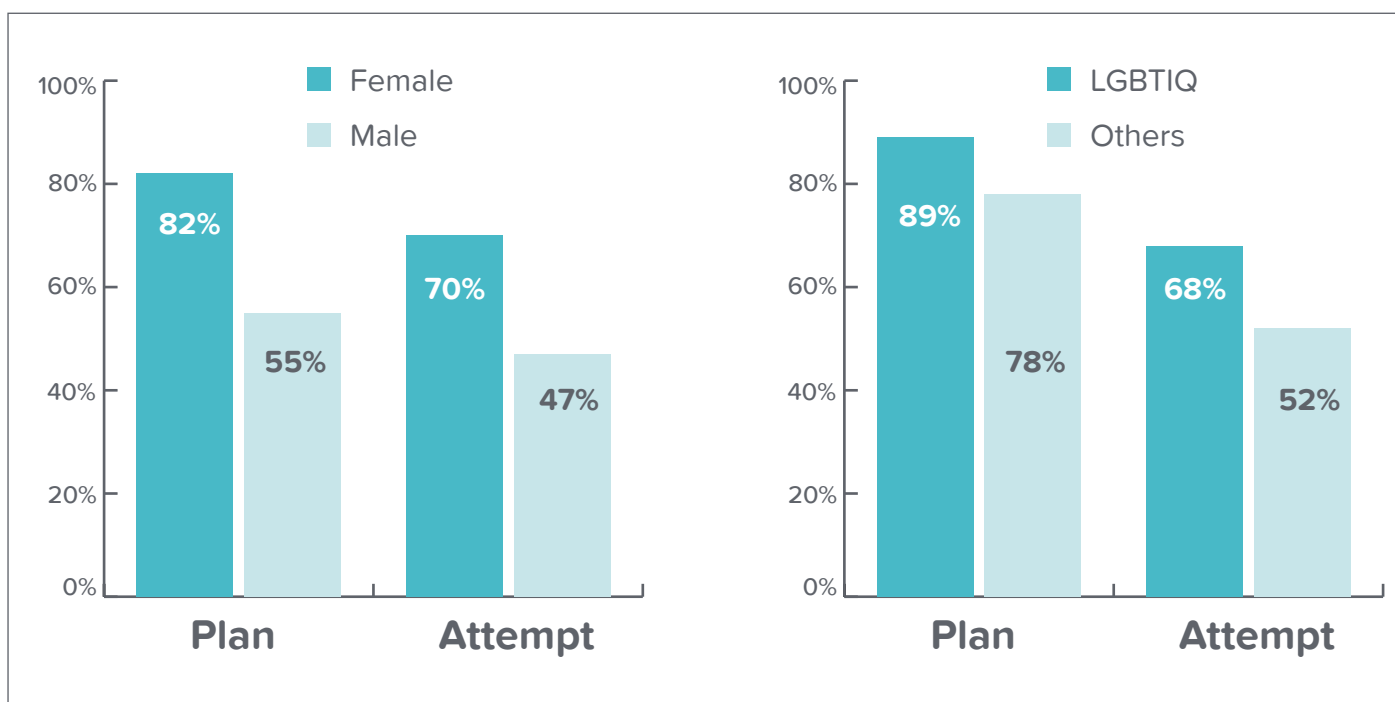
This also means that the views expressed and experiences described in the survey may

Figure 1. Severity and recency of suicidality



LGBTIQ young people are at high risk for suicide. They were more likely to have made a suicide plan and more likely to have attempted suicide than others.

Figure 2. Severity of suicidality by gender and LGBTIQ status



not represent the views and experiences of all young people. In particular, we note that many of the younger respondents were users of the Kids Helpline website and that our sample probably over-represents young people who have sought support from Kids Helpline counsellors.

We wanted to investigate whether different groups of young people

reported different experiences with seeking and getting support. It was difficult to draw any firm conclusions for two main reasons.

Many characteristics of young people were inter-related. For example, older respondents and females were more likely to have received professional support than others, but this may be explained, at least in part, by the more severe

suicidality reported by those groups.

In addition, the small number of people in some groups means that comparison may be unreliable. For example, only 13 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people and four young people from a non-English speaking background responded to questions about seeking and getting help.

APPENDIX A. SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. How old are you?
2. I identify my gender as:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Intersex, trans, gender diverse
 - Other _____
 - Prefer not to say
3. I identify as:
 - Aboriginal
 - Torres Strait Islander
 - Both
 - Neither
4. The main language my family speaks at home is:
 - English
 - Other _____
5. The suburb or postcode where I live is:
6. I identify as LGBTIQ
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
7. Have you ever:
(tick all that apply)
 - Thought about killing yourself
 - Less than 6 mths ago
 - 6 mths to 2 years ago
 - More than 2 years ago
 - Made plans to kill yourself
 - Less than 6 mths ago
 - 6 mths to 2 years ago
 - More than 2 years ago
 - Attempted to kill yourself
 - Less than 6 mths ago
 - 6 mths to 2 years ago
 - More than 2 years ago
8. Did you get help from anyone when this was happening?
 - No
 - Yes

If yes: How did you get help?

 - I told someone how I was feeling – who did you tell?
 - Someone noticed how I was feeling – who noticed?
 - I didn't get help until after my suicide attempt
 - Other _____
9. (For those who said they told someone)
We know that many young people who feel suicidal never tell anyone. What helped you to be able to tell someone?
10. Who else did you get help from? And how helpful were they? (not at all helpful, fairly helpful, very helpful)
 - Friend
 - Parent
 - Other family member
 - School (e.g. teacher or school counsellor)
 - Telephone counselling e.g. Kids Helpline or Lifeline)
 - Online
 - GP (local doctor)
 - Psychologist
 - Psychiatrist
 - Hospital
 - Headspace
 - Other mental health service
 - _____
 - Other _____
11. How would you say you're going now?
 - No better – I still think about suicide as much as ever
 - Better than before, but I still think about suicide
 - I don't think about suicide anymore
12. What do you feel has helped you? You can tell us a short story of a good experience of support if you like.
13. What else would have helped? (anything family or friends could have done? professional services?)
14. Did you have any experiences of support that were unhelpful or made you feel worse? What happened? And how did you deal with it?
15. Based on your experiences, is there any advice you would like to give to other young people, their family and friends?
16. What advice would you give to the people who provide services for young people who are feeling suicidal?