

MEDIA STATEMENT

Wednesday 25 October 2023

NEW RESEARCH SHOWS ADULTS CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN

Adults' attitudes towards children have changed to 'fortunate', 'tech savvy' and 'honest' and less 'selfish', 'lazy' or 'spoilt' according to ground-breaking new research released today.

Australian adults also believe that governments give 'too little' consideration to children when making decisions while 75 per cent of adults agreed the best interests of children should be considered in all decision making.

The Exploring Australian Adults' Attitudes Towards Children for a Better Future 2023 was commissioned by the Valuing Children Initiative and conducted by The University of Western Australia, Edith Cowan University and Curtin University.

The [report](#) surveyed 1008 adults across Australia on their attitudes towards children and compared results from the same study conducted in 2016.

The report made six recommendations including new mechanisms to amplify children's voices, greater support for families to facilitate children's development, school-based programs that empower children, better advocacy for children's rights and further research that impacts children's lives.

Mental health issues ranked the highest issue children faced, followed by family, education and drug and alcohol issues, while parents found financial pressure was their greatest issues when raising or caring for children.

Lead researcher Associate Professor Stephan Lund from UWA's School of Allied Health said the research confirmed that adults wanted children's voices to be amplified, to enable them to actively engage in decision-making and policy development.

"Accessible mental health support for children and young people needs to be top priority for our society," he said.

"This research has highlighted again that there is more to do for children and young people to address the epidemic of poor mental health. Adults are telling us that they want and need support in their families and that this is a community and societal issue that we all need to take responsibility for."

Valuing Children Initiative Development Executive Sarah Quinton said listening to children was not only their human right, but also gave children a sense of belonging and responsibility, which increased their wellbeing and agency in our community.

"It has been pleasing to see adults' attitudes about children change since the 2016 survey, it means the work we all do to give value to children is working but we still have a long way to go, particularly around online safety and mental health issues for our children and young people," she said.

"When it comes to issues like climate change, child protection, social media and universal access to quality education, children have a lot to say – it's time for us to listen."

Ms Quinton said the Valuing Children Initiative would use the research to build a pathway to better understanding the needs of children and encourage everyone in the community to do the same.

“By understanding how adults see children, we can challenge those ideas with information campaigns and mechanisms such as the Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tool that empower children in our decision-making processes. This ensures that we construct their world ‘with them’, not ‘to them’,” she said.

Six key recommendations:

1. **Amplifying Children’s Voices:** Creating inclusive mechanisms such as Child and Youth Impact Assessment Tools to enable children to actively engage in decision-making, including shaping policies that systematically prioritise their interests across various sectors.
2. **Supporting Parents and Families:** Enhanced support for parents through programs and initiatives that offer parenting education, guidance, and resources to promote healthier family dynamics and facilitate children's development.
3. **Increased Provision of Education Programs:** Schools should introduce programs that empower children with skills to address modern challenges, including online safety, mental health awareness, and critical thinking.
4. **Accessible Mental Health Support:** Ensuring children have access to mental health support which is tailored to their individual needs. Including increasing youth mental health services both within educational settings and the broader community.
5. **Increased Advocacy:** Increasing advocacy to protect children’s rights and ensure that the issues affecting children, such as climate change, remain at the forefront of public discourse.
6. **Future Research:** Ongoing research is vital to understand evolving issues impacting children and shape adaptive policies. Future studies, extending beyond surveys, will involve in-depth interviews to explore different contexts and track evolving attitudes towards children over time.

MEDIA REFERENCES:

[Simone Hewett](#) (UWA PR & Media Manager)

64883229 /0432 637 716

Sarah Quinton (Development Executive at the Valuing Children Initiative)

0439 439 233