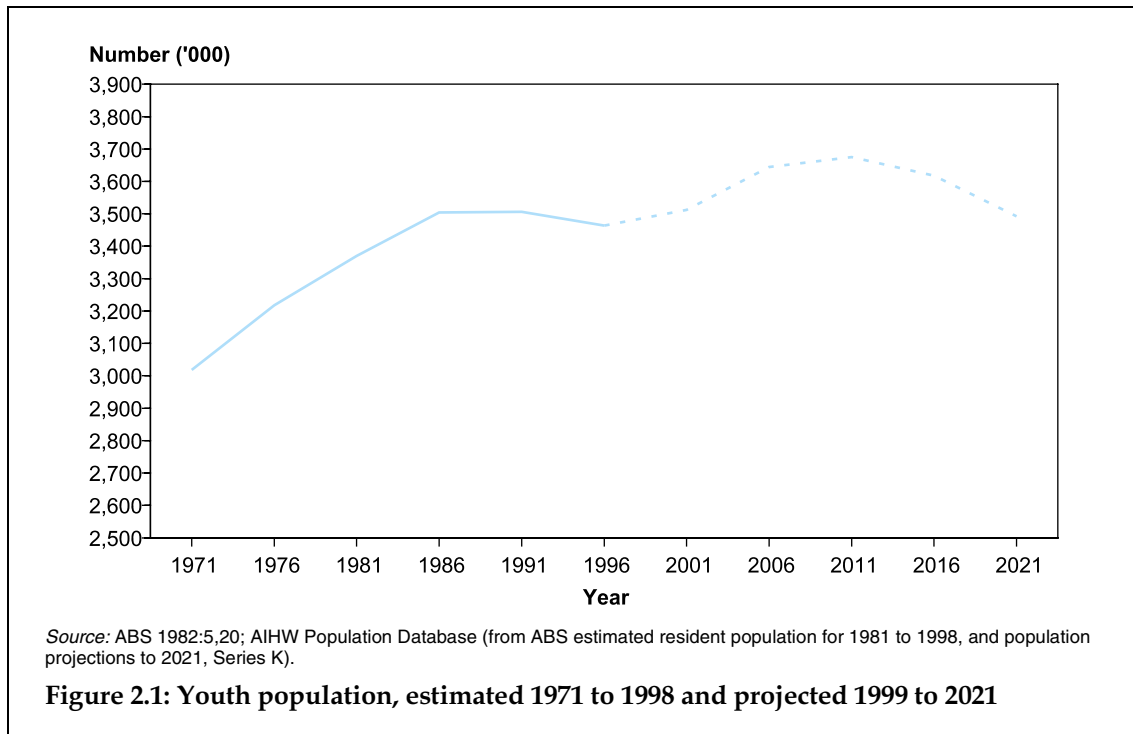


2 Population and family characteristics

This chapter gives details of the population and family characteristics of Australia's youth. These characteristics provide important background information for understanding the health and wellbeing of this age group. Such characteristics include the size of the youth population, their numbers relative to the total population, their distribution at each single year of age and for each sex, their distribution by geographic areas, and the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and overseas-born youth. Other information about Australia's youth that assists in building a picture of their situation includes their living arrangements, main activity (studying or working) and income levels.

Size of the youth population

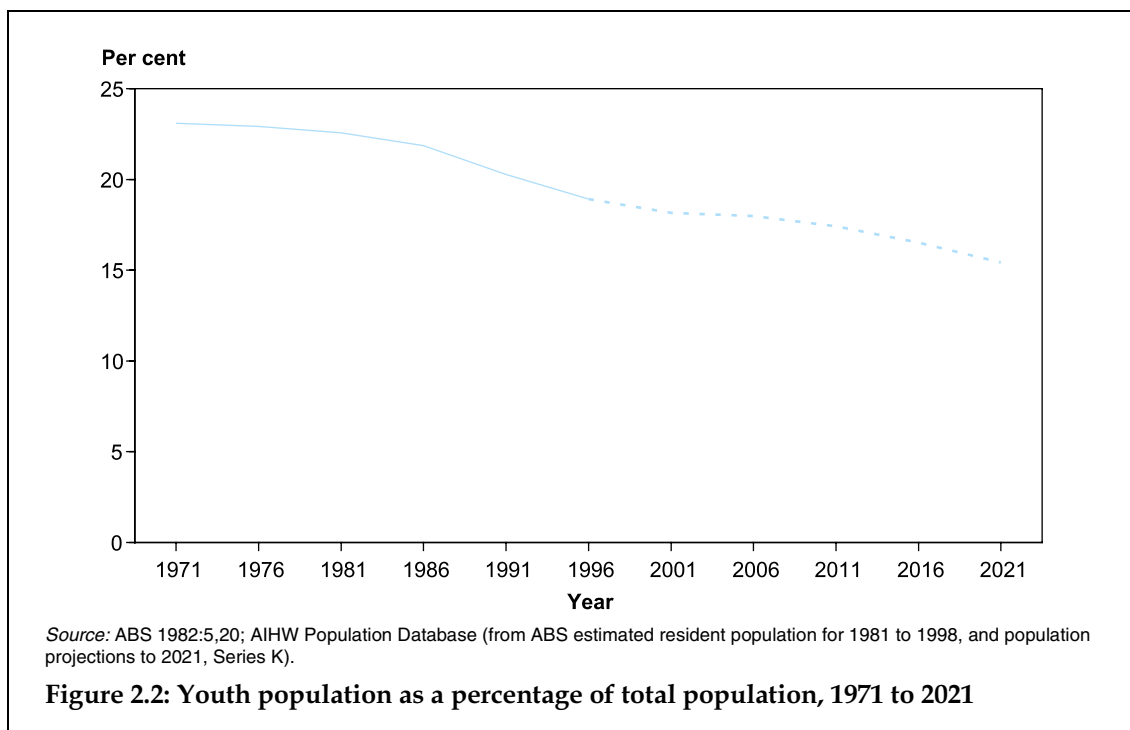
The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publishes annual estimates of the size of the resident population of Australia by age and sex, and various projections of the population for about 50 years into the future. This information (estimated resident population at 30 June, and Series K of the population projections) is used here to examine the size of the youth population (Figure 2.1) and its size relative to the total population of Australia.



- The size of Australia's youth population, those aged from 12 to 24 years, was estimated to be 3,470,000 in mid-1998.
- The youth population has increased steadily in recent years, from 3,018,000 in 1971 to 3,509,000 in 1990, and then declined slowly to 3,456,000 in 1997.
- The ABS projections (Series K) indicate that the youth population will increase again to 3,675,000 in 2011. This projected increase is based on the number of births that have occurred in recent years (between 250,000 and 260,000 each year in the 1990s), assumptions about mortality (which will have only a small impact on the numbers in this age group) and net migration (which is expected to increase some single-year cohorts to over 290,000).
- After 2011, the numbers are projected to decline due to assumptions in Series K of declining numbers of annual births and lower levels of net migration.

Youth as a proportion of the total population

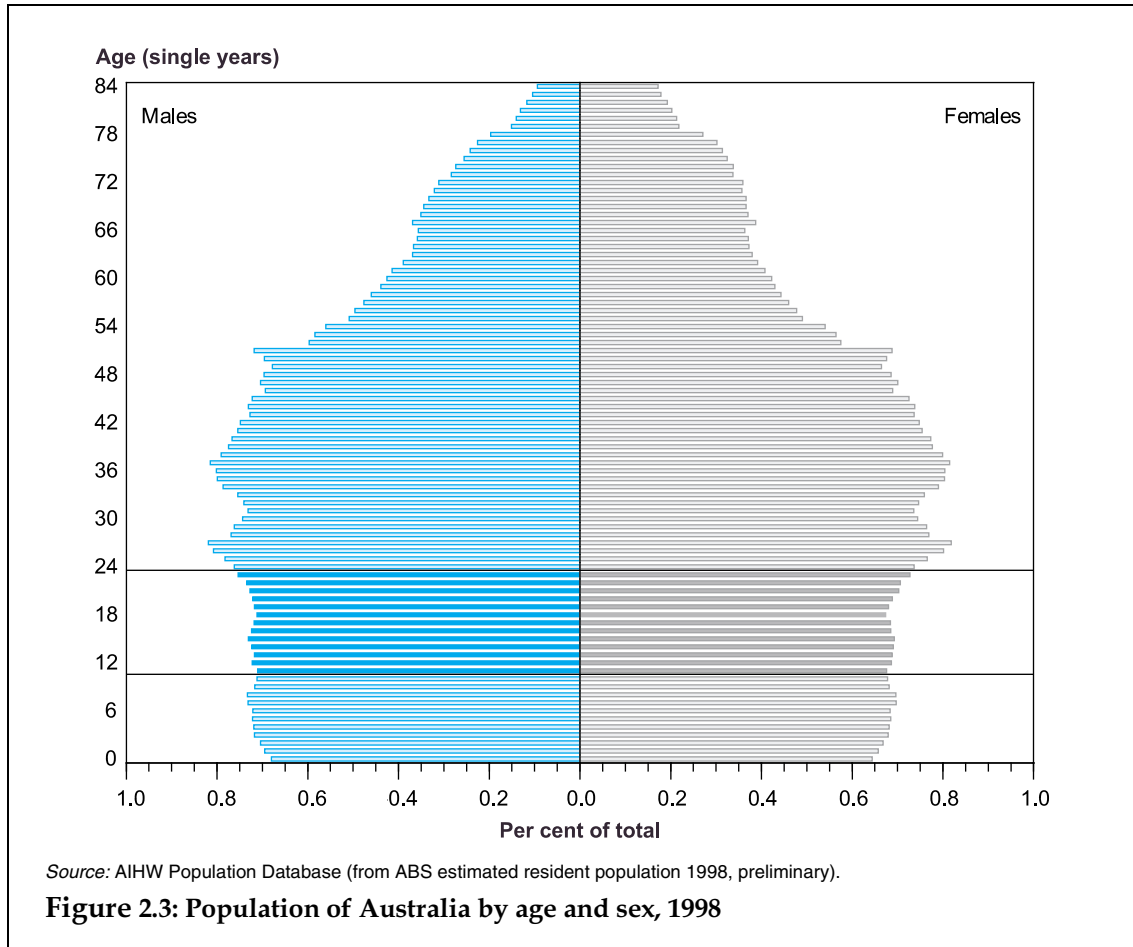
Even though the number of young people (aged 12–24 years) has increased until recently, and is projected to increase again up to 2011 (Figure 2.1), its proportion relative to the total population has declined and will continue to decline in the foreseeable future (Figure 2.2).



- The population of young people in 1998 represented 18.5% of the total population of 18,751,000 at that time. This was a substantial decline from 1971, when 23.1% of the total population were in this group.
- Projections of the population to 2021 indicate further declines in the proportion of the total population in this age group. In 2011, when the youth population is projected to peak at 3,675,000, its share of the total population will be 17.4%. By 2021, this figure is projected to decline to 15.4%.

Age and sex structure

The youth population is highlighted in the population pyramid of the total population shown in Figure 2.3. Each bar in the pyramid represents a single-year cohort, with males on the left-hand side and females on the right-hand side.



- In 1998, the single-year cohorts of the youth population ranged in size from 260,000 (age 18) to 281,000 (age 24).
- Male cohorts in the youth population are slightly larger than corresponding female cohorts at each year of age. For example, the ratio of males per 100 females was 105 at age 12, 106 at age 18, and 103 at age 24. This reflects the sex ratio at birth, where male births outnumber female births by around 5% (ABS 1998a:8).

State/Territory of residence

Table 2.1: Youth population by State/Territory of residence, 1998

State/Territory	Population aged 12–24	Total population	Percentage of State/Territory population aged 12–24	Per cent distribution of Australian population aged 12–24	Per cent distribution of Australian population (all ages)
New South Wales	1,145,746	6,341,594	18.1	33.0	33.8
Victoria	852,479	4,660,885	18.3	24.6	24.9
Queensland	662,063	3,456,345	19.2	19.1	18.4
Western Australia	354,694	1,831,399	19.4	10.2	9.8
South Australia	262,016	1,487,294	17.6	7.6	7.9
Tasmania	86,387	471,885	18.3	2.5	2.5
Australian Capital Territory	65,579	308,411	21.3	1.9	1.6
Northern Territory	40,584	189,991	21.4	1.2	1.0
Australia	3,470,115	18,750,982	18.5	100.0	100.0

Note: Per cent distributions may not total to 100.0 due to rounding.

Source: AIHW Population Database (from ABS estimated resident population, June 1998 preliminary).

- The distribution of Australia's youth population between the States and Territories (Table 2.1) is similar to the distribution of the total population, with about one-third in New South Wales, one-quarter in Victoria, one-fifth in Queensland, and one-tenth in Western Australia.
- Within each jurisdiction, the proportion of the population aged 12–24 years varied from just under 18% in South Australia to over 21% in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.

Youth in rural, remote and metropolitan areas

Data on the distribution of the population by rural, remote and metropolitan areas (RRMA) for 1997 are used in this section to examine the relative concentration of young people in certain areas and their relative absence in others. The RRMA classification was developed in 1994 jointly by the Department of Primary Industries and Energy and the then Department of Human Services and Health. The original classification recognised seven types of areas, which have been combined here into five areas (Table 2.2). The 'statistical local areas' (SLAs) used by the ABS have been grouped according to the RRMA classifications and thus the population in each type of RRMA can be estimated. Because the population numbers in some SLAs are quite small, the ABS estimates use 5-year age groups, and therefore the youth population referred to here covers the age group 15–24 years.

Table 2.2: Distribution of youth population (aged 15–24 years) and total population by area, 1997 (per cent)

Area	Males 15–24 years	Females 15–24 years	All persons
Capital cities	66.1	67.2	63.7
Other metropolitan centres	7.7	7.7	7.6
Rural centres	12.1	12.2	12.5
Other rural areas	11.0	10.1	13.3
Remote centres and areas	3.1	2.7	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number	1,361,342	1,305,550	18,529,112

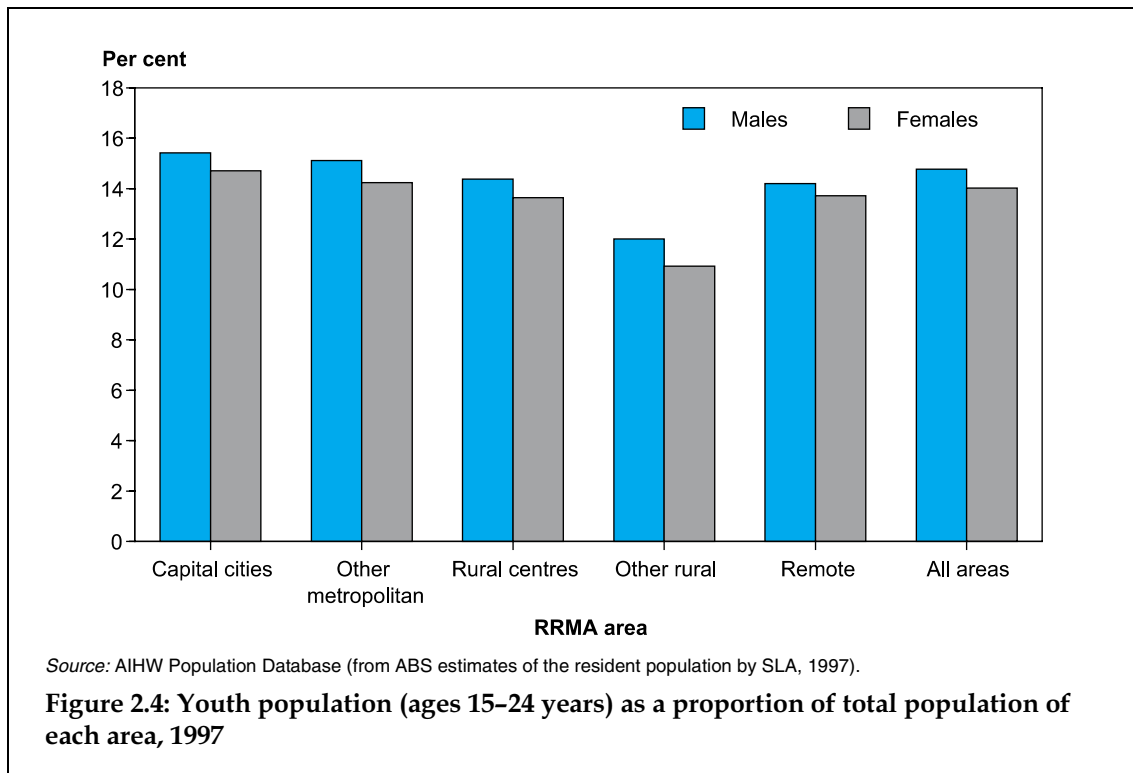
Note: Per cent distributions may not total to 100.0 due to rounding.

Source: AIHW Population Database (from ABS estimates of the resident population by SLA, 1997).

- The youth population (aged 15–24 years) is somewhat over-represented in the capital cities (66% of young males and 67% of young females, compared with 64% of the total population) and underrepresented in 'other rural areas' (11% of young males and 10% of young females, compared with 13% of the total population).
- The proportion of youth in 'other metropolitan centres', 'rural centres', and 'remote centres and areas' is comparable to the proportion of the total population living in those areas.

Population and family characteristics

The under-representation of young people in 'other rural areas' is even more evident when analysing the representation of the youth population in each of the areas (Figure 2.4).



- Although males in the age group 15–24 years make up about 15% of all Australian males, they represent only about 12% of the male population in 'other rural areas'.
- About 14% of all Australian females are in this age group, compared with only 11% of females in 'other rural areas'.
- An AIHW analysis of age distributions by RRMA also found that young adults (aged 15–29 years) were underrepresented in 'other rural areas', and ascribed this finding to 'the established pattern of young adults leaving country areas and migrating to cities and large towns' (AIHW 1998:7). The other age groups used in that analysis (0–14, 50–54 and 55 years and over), however, were not underrepresented in 'other rural areas'.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth

Indigenous status is widely used in analysing differences in health and wellbeing in Australia. The identification and enumeration of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander population, however, is incomplete in most data collections. The ABS has used information collected in the population censuses to estimate the number and distribution (by 5-year age groups) of Indigenous people, the latest being for 1996 (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (ages 15–24), 1996

Age group	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (number)	All youth (number)	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth as percentage of Australian population	Age group as percentage of total: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth	Age group as percentage of total: all youth
15–19	38,014	1,279,119	3.0	9.8	7.0
20–24	36,637	1,396,866	2.6	9.5	7.6
15–24	74,651	2,675,985	2.8	19.3	14.6
All ages	386,049	18,310,714	2.1

Source: AIHW Population Database (from ABS estimates of Indigenous population, 1996).

- In 1996, the ABS estimated that there were 386,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, representing about 2.1% of the total population of Australia.
- Nearly 75,000 of those identifying as Indigenous were young people aged 15–24 years. Using the ABS age groups, 2.8% of the total youth population were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- Youth constituted 19% of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. By comparison, less than 15% of the total Australian population were aged 15–24 years.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a younger age structure (higher proportions in the younger age groups) than the non-Indigenous population due to higher levels of fertility and premature mortality.

Country of birth of youth

Nearly a quarter of all Australian residents in 1998 were born overseas. The proportion born overseas among the youth aged 12–24 years is less (15%), partly because migrants tend to be concentrated in the working ages, and partly because people in this age group have, by definition, lived fewer years and therefore have had fewer opportunities to migrate. Even so, the youth population includes many migrants (Table 2.4).

Table 2.4: Country of birth of youth population, 1998

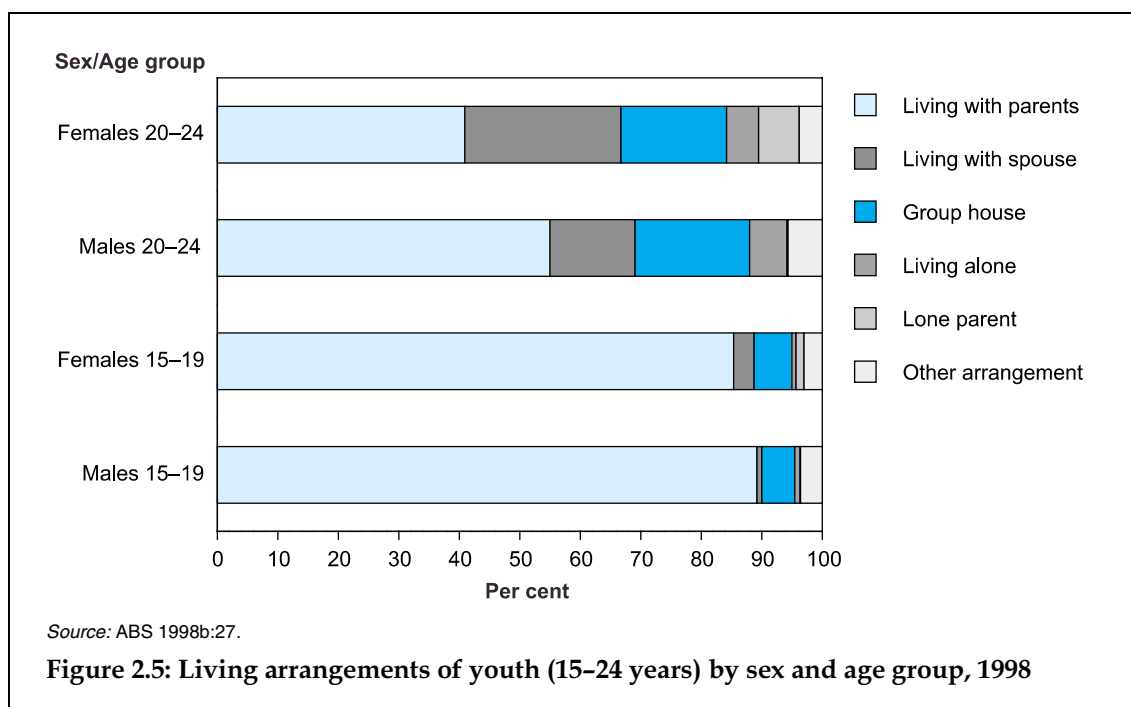
Place of birth	Youth (ages 12–24)	Total population	Youth as percentage of total population	Per cent distribution of youth by birthplace	Per cent distribution of total population by birthplace
Australia	2,940,218	14,356,612	20.5	84.7	76.6
New Zealand	59,864	339,323	17.6	1.7	1.8
UK and Ireland	72,093	1,230,394	5.9	2.1	6.6
Other Europe	56,907	1,197,684	4.8	1.6	6.4
Asia	261,801	1,178,723	22.2	7.5	6.3
All other	79,232	448,246	17.8	2.3	2.4
Total	3,470,115	18,750,982	18.5	100.0	100.0

Source: AIHW Population Database (from ABS estimates of country of birth, 1998 preliminary).

- Nearly 85% of the youth population (ages 12–24) in 1998 were born in Australia, compared with 77% of the total population.
- About half (262,000) of the 531,000 youth born overseas were born in Asia, with 72,000 born in the United Kingdom and Ireland, 57,000 in other European countries, and 60,000 in New Zealand.
- Youth constituted a relatively small proportion, about 5%, of those born in Europe, compared with 18% of those born in New Zealand, 22% of those born in Asia, and 21% of those born in Australia.

Living arrangements

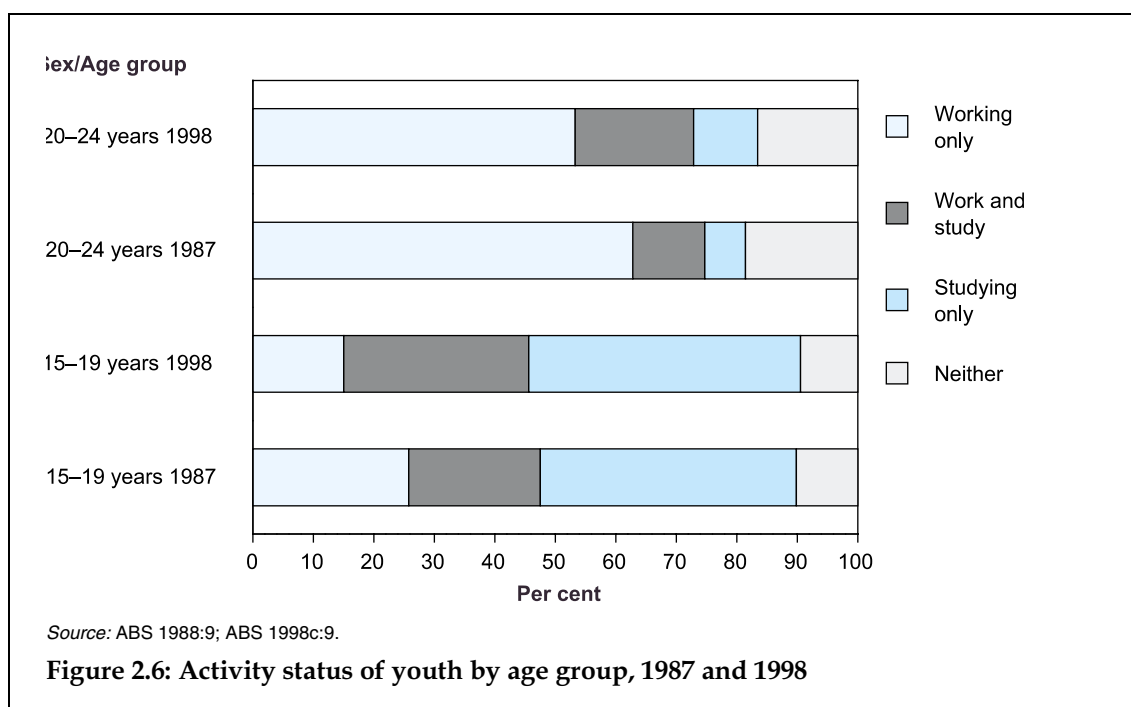
Where youth live – with their parents, with a spouse or partner, on their own, or in a group house – may have an important bearing on their health and wellbeing. The ABS collects such information as part of the Monthly Population Survey, and these data for the youth population are shown in Figure 2.5.



- Of those aged 15–19 years, a large proportion lived with their parents – 85% of females and 90% of males. About 5% lived in group houses, and about 3% of the females were living with a spouse or partner.
- Of those aged 20–24 years, 55% of males and 41% of females lived with their parents.
- The proportion of females aged 20–24 years living with a spouse or partner was 26% compared with 14% for males.
- A substantial proportion (20%) of males and females aged 20–24 years lived in group houses, and 5% lived alone. In addition, 7% of the females in this age group were lone parents.

Activity status

Information on the major 'activity' of individuals – whether they are working or studying, or doing both or neither – is collected by the ABS annually in May as part of the Monthly Population Survey. Significant differences between the older and younger halves of the youth population are evident in these data (Figure 2.6), an indication of the change in the life course that occurs at this age, as young people make the transition from school to work. More detailed information on education and labour force participation is presented in Chapters 20 and 21.



- The main activity for the age group 15–19 years is studying, whereas for the age group 20–24 years it is working. In 1998, over three-quarters of 15–19 year olds were in some form of study ('studying only' or 'work and study'), and nearly the same proportion of 20–24 year olds were working (either 'working only' or 'working and studying').
- Significant proportions of both age groups are in the 'work and study' category). These proportions increased between 1987 and 1998, from 22% to 31% for the age group 15–19 years, and from 12% to 20% for the age group 20–24 years.
- The proportions of both age groups in some form of studying ('studying only' plus 'work and study') increased between 1987 and 1998, but the proportions in work ('working only' plus 'work and study') declined slightly.
- In both years, about 10% of those in the age group 15–19 years were neither studying nor working. For those aged 20–24 years, the proportions in this category were 19% in 1987 and 17% in 1998. For the younger age group, two-thirds of this category in 1998 were unemployed, and the remainder were classified as 'not in the labour force' (data not shown). The older group was split evenly, half of those neither working nor studying being unemployed and half 'not in the labour force'.

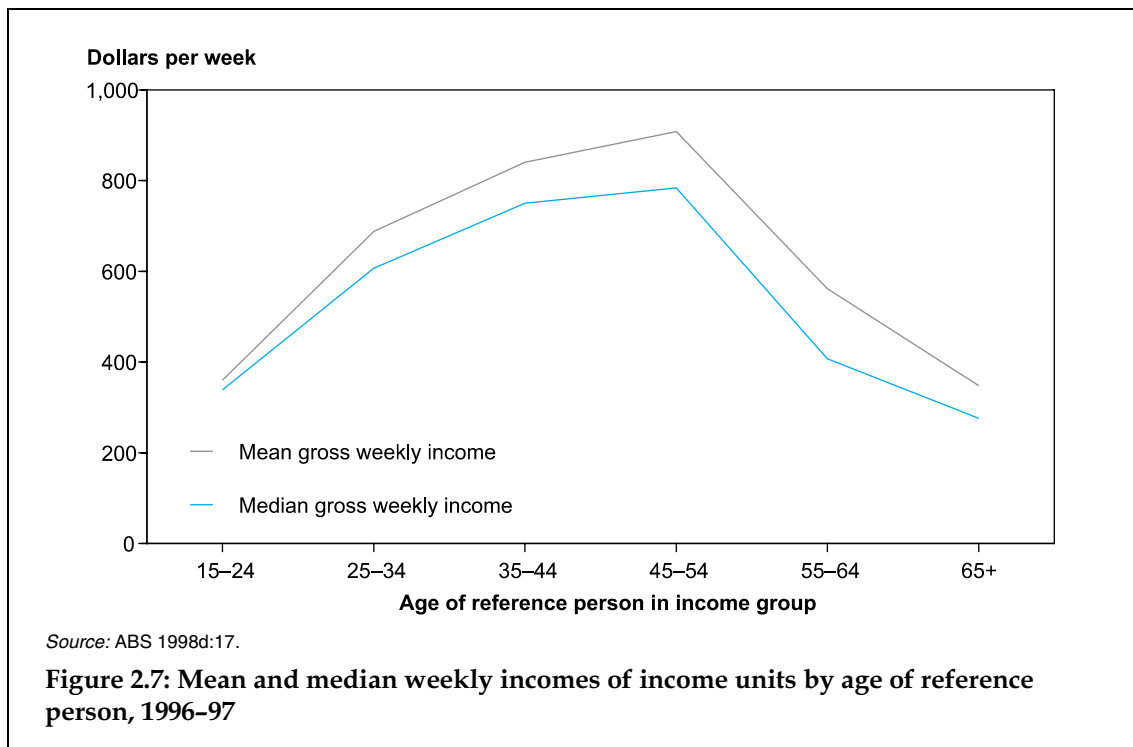
Income

It is difficult to analyse information on the income levels of young people because of the various types of living arrangements they have. The ABS examines income on the basis of 'income units', which are defined as follows (ABS 1998d:61):

One person or a group of related persons within a household, whose command over income is assumed to be shared. Income sharing is assumed to take place within married (registered or de facto) couples, and between parents and dependent children.

The most recent data on income units is from the ABS Survey of Income and Housing Costs for the period 1996–97. At that time there were 9.1 million income units in Australia. In 1.5 million (16%) of these, the 'reference person' (the male partner in a couple income unit, the parent in a one-parent income unit, and the person in a one-person income unit) was aged 15–24 years. Most (91%) of these were one-person income units, either a young person living on his or her own or with unrelated people, or non-dependent children in their parents' household (ABS 1998d:17).

The principal source of income for 70% of the income units where the reference person was aged 15–24 years was wages, for 21% it was from government pensions or allowances, for 4% it was other sources (most likely scholarships for this age group), and most of the remaining units (5%) had no income (ABS 1998d:17). The ABS believes that most of this latter group were probably still financially dependent on their parents, even though they were classified otherwise in the income survey (ABS 1998d:7).



- The mean gross weekly income for income units where the age of the reference person was 15–24 years was \$360, and the median (a more appropriate statistic, as the distribution of income is highly skewed) was \$339 (Figure 2.7).
- These were well below the comparable figures for all income units of \$625 and \$477, and were lower than the figures for other groups based on age of the reference person, except for those where the reference person was aged 65 years or older.

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