

MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 7 September 2016

Children need adults to pay attention when they raise concerns about safety

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse today released a report which presents the findings of a national survey of children and young people on their perspectives about interpersonal safety in institutions.

Findings from the study suggest that children and young people most need an adult to pay attention when children and young people raise a concern or worry about their safety. This was seen as important as almost a half believed that an adult would only know if a child or young person was unsafe if the child told them.

“Children and young people were often ambivalent about adults’ ability to identify risks of abuse in schools, holiday camps, sporting teams and church groups,” lead researcher Dr Tim Moore said.

“They also indicated a reluctance to seek help at school when they encountered an adult who was demonstrating potentially abusive behaviours, often relying on friends or family or dealing with their concerns alone.”

The report, *Our safety counts: Children and young people’s perceptions of safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns*, focuses on the second phase of a study conducted by Australian Catholic University’s (ACU) Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS), in partnership with Griffith University and the Queensland University of Technology.

The Australian Survey of Kids and Young People (ASK-YP) invited young Australians aged 10-18 to provide their perspectives about interpersonal safety, safety in institutions, and how institutions could better respond to their safety needs. The survey was completed by 1,480 children and young people in 2015.

ICPS Senior Research Fellow Dr Moore said the study was the first of its kind in that it directly engaged with children and young people about issues of interpersonal safety in institutions. The survey drew on the findings of focus groups conducted with 121 children and young people.

“History tells us that when children and young people’s needs and concerns are not understood, and their wishes not acted upon, children and young people are at significant risk of experiencing a range of problems, including child sexual abuse,” Dr Moore said.

“The survey findings indicate that most children and young people feel safe in the institutions they engage with, such as schools, sports teams, holidays camps and church. However, about 10 per cent of young people aged over 14 were sceptical about whether adults know children well enough, or

talk to children about the things that kids are worried about.”

Dr Moore said that young women in particular stressed the importance of knowing what to do and say when they encountered a potentially abusive adult or peer but often believed that they had not received adequate guidance at school on how to protect themselves.

“Our findings stress the importance of listening to children and young people and actively engaging them in developing responses to child sexual abuse that meet their needs”.

Read the report here:

<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/policy-and-research/our-research/published-research/our-safety-counts>

Dr Tim Moore is available for interview

Media Contact: Jen Rosenberg, jen.rosenberg@acu.edu.au, 0407 845 634