



Definition

Kids Help Line defines rural and remote regions of Australia according to Australian Bureau of Statistics criteria where rural centres have populations between 5,000 and 99,000 and remote communities populations below 5,000.

Young people living in rural and remote areas of Australia currently face many challenges. Changes in the Australian economy, largely due to shifting global markets, have resulted in social and economic decline for many regional Australian centres. As a result, many children in rural and remote Australia face lower standards of living, poorer health outcomes, fewer educational and employment opportunities and higher rates of suicide (AIHW, 1999; Macknay, 1999).

The proportion of calls to Kids Help Line (KHL) from young people residing in rural and remote Australia has been increasing in recent years and accounted for almost 40% of calls in 2002 which is greater than the proportion of 5 to 18 year olds estimated to be residing in regional Australia (ABS, 2001).

In the three years between January 2000 and December 2002 KHL counsellors responded to 32,287 counselling calls from children and young people who indicated that they lived in a rural or remote region of Australia. Given that only 37% of callers choose to reveal their location, this figure is a significant under-representation of the actual number of calls from young people living in these regions.

As part of various state and federal funding agreements, Kids Help Line's telephone system has been programmed to give young people living in regional areas priority access to counsellors.

Caller Profile

Ethnicity

Young people of Indigenous backgrounds are responsible for 13% of regional calls which is more than triple the proportion of calls made by Indigenous callers living in urban centres (4%). This closely reflects the population distribution of Indigenous people across Australia (AIHW, 1999). (For more information about callers from Indigenous backgrounds see Infosheet 23).

Anglo-Australians are responsible for 82% of the calls from regional Australia with the remaining 5% of calls made by young people of non-English (3%) and other English (2%) speaking backgrounds.

Age and Gender

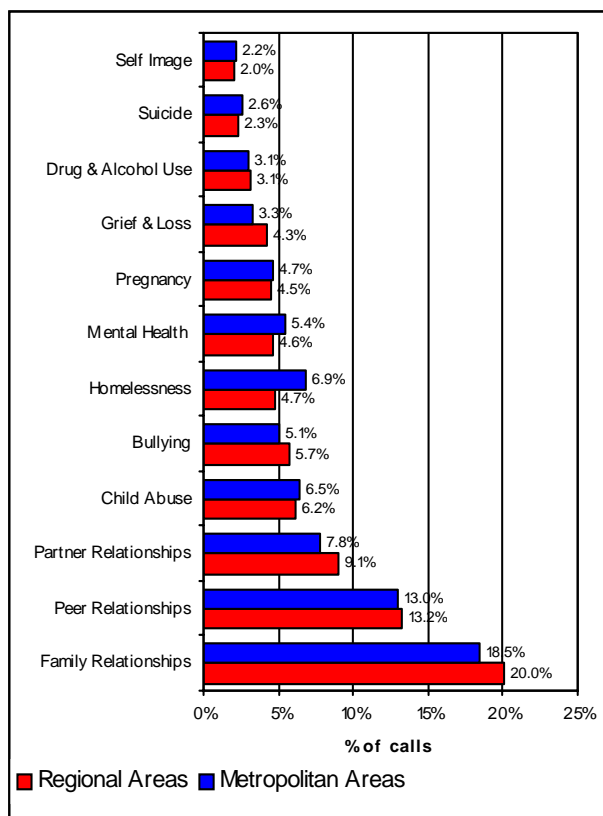
Females are responsible for 73% of calls from rural and remote Australia. Males make the remaining 27% which is equivalent to the proportion of calls made by their metropolitan counterparts (26%).

Fifty-three percent of regional callers are aged under 15 years compared to 47% of metropolitan callers. This age difference may be partly due to older children moving away from regional centres to larger cities in the pursuit of educational and employment opportunities or perhaps reflect higher fertility rates in regional areas (AIHW, 1998).

AGE	REGIONAL	METRO
5-9 years	6%	5%
10-14 years	47%	42%
15-18 years	47%	53%

Main Problems

The issues rural and remote young people call about are very similar to that of metropolitan callers. The following graph compares their top twelve concerns (of a possible 36) with those of young people living in metropolitan areas. Together these twelve problems account for almost 80% of calls from young people living in rural and remote Australia.



Children and young people from regional areas make a slightly higher proportion of calls about interpersonal relationships than metropolitan callers, highlighting the importance of close family and partner relationships in sparsely populated areas. Regional callers also make a greater proportion of calls about bullying and grief but a smaller proportion of calls about suicide, homelessness and mental health issues.

Despite interpersonal relationships being the main concern for both genders, differences are apparent in the problems which concern males and females in rural and remote areas. The table overleaf shows the seven main problems for male and female callers from regional Australia in rank order.

<i>FEMALE</i>	<i>MALE</i>
Interpersonal Relationships	Interpersonal Relationships
Child Abuse	Bullying
Pregnancy	Homelessness
Mental Health	Child Abuse
Loss & Grief	Drug and Alcohol Use
Bullying	Loss & Grief
Homelessness	Mental Health

Family Relationships

Despite the fact that young regional Australians make a slightly greater proportion of calls about family relationships than their metropolitan counterparts, there is a great deal of similarity across regions in the nature of these calls with almost half (49%) relating to occasional or frequent family conflict. A further 37% of callers report major family conflict, separation or divorce with the remaining 14% calling out of concern for another family member.

The majority of family relationship calls are made by females (75%). Children aged 10 to 14 years make 59% of these calls with older children (15 to 18 years) responsible for a further 31% and younger children (5 to 9 years) the remaining 10%.

Relationships with Partners

Rural and remote callers make a slightly greater proportion of calls in relation to intimate relationships. Similar to metropolitan callers, the majority of these young people want to establish a relationship (23%) or are negotiating an existing relationship (31%). A further 4% call about being pressured to have sex, 16% report significant relationship difficulties and 26% call about relationship breakdown.

Calls about partner relationships are most frequently made by females (75%) and 15 to 18 year olds (64%). However, regional 10 to 14 year olds (36%) are over represented in these calls compared to their metropolitan counterparts (29%). This may be partly due to older adolescents moving away from regional areas but also suggests that rural and remote young people begin to establish intimate relationships at a younger age than their counterparts living in urban centres.

Bullying

Regional callers are slightly over represented in the proportion of calls made about bullying compared to their metropolitan counterparts. While 16% of these calls are about an isolated incidence, episodic bullying is reported in 40% of calls with frequent or continual harassment reported in a further 38%. The remaining 6% of calls are from young people who are seeking information about bullying.

Males from regional Australia make a greater proportion of calls about bullying (42%) than males in metropolitan areas (39%), making this the second most common reason, after interpersonal relationships, young males living in regional areas contact KHL.

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Grief & Loss

The proportion of calls from young people living in regional Australia about grief and loss (4%) is 30% higher than for metropolitan callers (3%). While 3% of these callers are simply seeking information, most (60%) need to talk through a personal experience of loss. Young people calling about a recent loss account for 23% of calls with a further 6% unable to return to their normal way of life. Extreme long term distress is reported by 8% of callers.

Non-Problem & Chat Calls

Twenty-two percent of non-problem calls from metropolitan areas are from children and young people who are bored and simply want to chat or tell a joke - this increases to 36% for children and young people calling from rural and remote areas of Australia.

Many young people living in rural and remote areas of Australia who call KHL to chat report having nothing to do and nowhere to go as a result of there being few facilities within their communities. Consequently, boredom is a very common theme in calls from regional Australia. This is particularly true for young males who make almost triple the proportion of chat calls (64%) compared to their metropolitan counterparts (22%).

Call Outcomes

The majority of calls from regional Australia are of a nature that require no referral (70%). Eighteen percent of regional callers are referred to other support services (including crisis responses and three-way link ups), however, this compares rather poorly to the 25% of metropolitan callers who are given referrals*. This difference in referral rates is likely to be due to a combination of poorer access to child specific services in regional areas and the high visibility of young people in small rural and remote centres leading to concerns about confidentiality.

A further 6% of callers are given non-specific referrals to their local doctor, teacher or school/guidance counsellor. The remaining 6% were unable to be referred due to there being no appropriate service in the young person's area or the client terminating the call before a referral could be given.

*As this infosheet is based on data where caller location was known (and referrals can only be given when location is known), the referral rates are higher than national figures reported elsewhere as national data also includes calls where caller location is unknown.

References

- ABS. (2001). CDATA 2001. Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- AIHW. (1998). Health in Rural and Remote Australia. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- AIHW. (1999). Australia's Young People: Their Health and Wellbeing 1999. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.
- Macknay, T. (1999). Conditions in Rural and Regional Australia. Canberra: Australian Federal Government.

See also Kids Help Line Infosheet 23: Callers from Indigenous Backgrounds.

For more information

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