

DESIRED OUTCOMES

People enjoy constructive relationships with others in their families, whānau, communities, iwi and workplaces. Families support and nurture those in need of care. New Zealand is an inclusive society where people are able to access information and support.

Social Connectedness

INTRODUCTION

Social connectedness refers to the relationships people have with others.

Social connectedness is integral to wellbeing. People are defined by their social roles, whether as partners, parents, children, friends, caregivers, teammates, staff or employers, or a myriad of other roles. Relationships give people support, happiness, contentment and a sense they belong and have a role to play in society.⁹⁰ They also mean people have support networks in place they can call on for help during hard times.

Social connectedness also refers to people joining together to achieve shared goals that benefit each other and society as a whole – this may range from working together as part of a business to contributing to their communities through voluntary groups.

One of the most important aspects of social connectedness is the relationship people have with a spouse or a partner. Studies have consistently found having a partner contributes to a person's reported level of wellbeing.⁹¹

Several studies have demonstrated links between social connectedness and the performance of the economy and positive outcomes for individual health and wellbeing.⁹²

Social connectedness is fostered when family relationships are positive, and when people have the skills and opportunities to make friends and to interact constructively with others. Good health, employment, and feeling safe and secure all increase people's chances of developing positive relationships.

There can be many barriers to social connectedness. The tendency to make connections outside the family varies between cultures and communities. Factors such as language differences, high levels of inequality and tensions between members of different ethnic groups can create barriers between people.

INDICATORS

Five indicators are used to measure New Zealand's levels of social connectedness. These are: telephone and internet access in the home, regular contact with family/friends, trust in others, the proportion of the population experiencing loneliness and contact between young people and their parents.

Together, the five indicators measure the opportunities for and the actual levels of connection between people, both within their immediate social groups and within the wider community. Access to the internet is significant. It improves people's ability to access information and, as a consequence, it provides more opportunities for people to participate in society. Both the telephone and the internet enable people to keep in touch without seeing each other face to face. This means social connectedness can be maintained when people are in different cities or even in different countries. It also means new social networks can be opened up across geographical boundaries between people who may never have met.

For most people, social networks centre on family and friends. The second indicator measures the proportion of people who keep in touch with family and friends by having them over for a meal at least once a month.

Trust in others, the third indicator, measures the extent to which people expect others to act fairly and honestly towards them. High levels of trust enhance wellbeing by facilitating co-operative behaviour among people who otherwise do not know each other. Trust also enhances people's ability to develop positive relationships with others.

The fourth indicator measures levels of loneliness. Feelings of isolation and loneliness undermine overall wellbeing and can be detrimental to people's physical and emotional health, resulting in stress, anxiety or depression.

The final indicator, the proportion of young people who report getting enough time each week with their parents, is a measure of the extent to which people in need of care and nurturing receive that support.

Telephone and internet access in the home

DEFINITION

The proportion of the population with telephone and internet access in the home, as measured by the New Zealand Living Standards Surveys.

RELEVANCE

Being able to communicate and interact easily in the absence of frequent face-to-face contact helps maintain social connectedness. Access to a telephone and access to communication via the internet, especially emails, are particularly relevant as social indicators because mail services are almost universal and fax use is principally by businesses. The internet also makes it easier to access a significant and growing repository of information and knowledge.

CURRENT LEVEL AND TRENDS

In 2004, 96 percent of households had access to a telephone, a similar proportion to that in 2000 (97 percent). While there has been little change in telephone access, there has been a big increase in the proportion of the population with internet access at home. In 2004, almost two-thirds of adults (65 percent) had access to the internet, compared with 37 percent in 2000.

Table SC1.1 **Proportion (%) of the population with telephone and internet access in the home, by population characteristics, 2000 and 2004**

	Telephone access		Internet access	
	2000	2004	2000	2004
Population estimates				
Total adult population 18 years and over	96.6	95.6	36.5	65.1
Dependent children	94.7	91.3	38.8	66.0
Age groupings				
Adults 18–64 years	96.2	94.9	40.9	70.6
Adults 65 years and over	99.2	99.5	11.4	33.6
Economic family ethnicity				
Māori economic family	90.4	83.7	26.9	45.5
Pacific economic family	82.2	89.0	11.0	39.5
European economic family	98.0	96.9	36.8	63.1
Other economic family	98.3	96.4	50.5	79.6
Families with dependent children				
One-parent with dependent children	89.3	88.7	22.8	50.2
Two parents with dependent children	97.4	94.9	46.5	77.7
All families with dependent children	95.1	93.0	39.7	69.4
Family employment/income status				
18–64 year olds, main income earner in full-time employment	97.7	95.4	42.6	73.5
18–64 year olds, main income earner not in full-time employment	92.0	92.1	32.5	59.0
65 year olds and over, with employment or other income (in addition to New Zealand Superannuation)	99.3	100.0	20.5	54.2
65 year olds and over, with little or no other income (in addition to New Zealand Superannuation)	98.9	99.1	9.1	30.6

Sources: Ministry of Social Development (2003b); Ministry of Social Development (2006)

Note: Revisions to the weights of the New Zealand Living Standards 2000 data mean that data in this table will not agree with data published in The Social Report 2005

AGE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

People aged 65 years and over were more likely than those aged 18–64 years to have a telephone. However, adults under 65 years were more likely to have internet access in their home (71 percent compared with 34 percent for those aged 65 years and over). Older people with no income other than New Zealand Superannuation had the lowest level of internet access in the home (31 percent). However, the fastest growth in internet access levels between 2000 and 2004 was experienced by older people with employment or other income above New Zealand Superannuation (increasing from 21 percent in 2000 to 54 percent in 2004).

Where the main earner in the family was not in full-time employment, telephone and internet access in the home was lower than average. The difference was particularly striking for internet access (74 percent when the main earner was in full-time employment compared with 59 percent when they were not).

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

People living in Pacific economic families (those with any Pacific member) had the lowest level of internet access in the home (39 percent) in 2004. However, they had strong growth in access between 2000 (when only 11 percent had internet access) and 2004. People living in European and Other economic families experienced similar growth rates. People living in Māori economic families had the lowest rate of growth in internet access. Twenty-seven percent had access in 2000 and 45 percent in 2004. The highest level of internet access in the home in 2004 was among people living in Other economic families (80 percent).

Telephone access rates in 2004 were lowest among people living in Māori economic families (84 percent) and highest in European economic families (97 percent). Between 2000 and 2004, levels of telephone access dropped slightly in all economic family types except Pacific, where the rate rose from 82 percent to 89 percent over the period.

DIFFERENCES BY FAMILY TYPE

Overall, families with dependent children were more likely than average to have internet access in the home. However, sole-parent families were less likely than two-parent families to have either internet access or a telephone (50 percent compared to 78 percent for internet access and 89 percent compared to 95 percent for a telephone).

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

New Zealand compares relatively favourably with other countries for internet access, with 61 percent of households having access to the internet in 2006. New Zealand ranked tenth out of 30 OECD countries and above the OECD median of 54 percent, based on data for the years 2003–2006. New Zealand ranked about the same as Canada (60 percent in 2004), above Australia (56 percent in 2004), the United Kingdom (56 percent in 2005) and the United States (55 percent in 2003).⁹³

Regular contact with family/friends

DEFINITION

The proportion of the population who had family or friends over for a meal at least once a month, as measured by the New Zealand Living Standards Surveys.

RELEVANCE

The extent to which people are in regular contact with family and friends is an important reflection of social connectedness.

CURRENT LEVEL AND TRENDS

Seventy percent of adults aged 18 years and over had friends or family over for a meal at least once a month in 2004. This was about the same level as in 2000 when 69 percent had family or friends over for a meal.

Table SC2.1 **Proportion (%) of the population having family/friends over for a meal, by population characteristics, 2000 and 2004**

	Have family/friends over for a meal	
	2000	2004
Population estimates		
Total population aged 18 and over	68.6	70.0
Age groupings		
Adults aged 18–64 years	70.0	71.1
Adults 65 years and over	60.2	63.7
Economic family ethnicity		
Māori economic family	70.2	73.3
Pacific economic family	79.5	69.9
European economic family	65.8	65.8
Other economic family	68.2	78.0
Families with dependent children		
One-parent with dependent children	64.8	64.8
Two parents with dependent children	70.8	73.4
All families with dependent children	69.1	70.8
Family employment/income status		
18–64 year olds, main income earner in full-time employment	69.4	72.4
18–64 year olds, main income earner not in full-time employment	67.7	62.9
65 year olds and over, with employment or other income (above New Zealand Superannuation)	75.3	79.7
65 year olds and over, with little or no other income (above New Zealand Superannuation)	56.5	61.8

Sources: Ministry of Social Development (2003b); Ministry of Social Development (2006)

AGE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

People aged 65 years and over who had employment income or other income in addition to New Zealand Superannuation were the group most likely to have friends or family over for a meal (80 percent). In contrast, those in the same age group with little income above New Zealand Superannuation were the least likely to have people over for a meal (62 percent). Similarly, among adults under 65 years, families where the main earner in the family was not in full-time employment were less likely than those with the main earner in full-time employment to have people over for dinner (63 percent compared with 72 percent).

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

According to the 2004 New Zealand Living Standards Survey, people living in Other economic families were the most likely to have friends or family over for a meal at least once a month (78 percent). Māori were also slightly more likely than average to do this (73 percent). Those living in European families had below-average levels of having people over for a meal (66 percent), while Pacific families had average levels (70 percent). Between 2000 and 2004, the biggest increase in the proportion of families having friends or family over for a meal was among Other families (up 10 percentage points) and the biggest decrease was among Pacific families (down 10 percentage points).

DIFFERENCES BY FAMILY TYPE

Sole-parent families were less likely than two-parent families to have friends or family over for a meal (65 percent compared to 73 percent). Two-parent families were slightly more likely to have friends or family over for a meal in 2004 than in 2000, but there was no change for sole-parent families.

Trust in others

DEFINITION

The proportion of the population aged 15 years and over reporting people can “almost always” or “usually” be trusted, as reported in the Quality of Life Survey 2006.

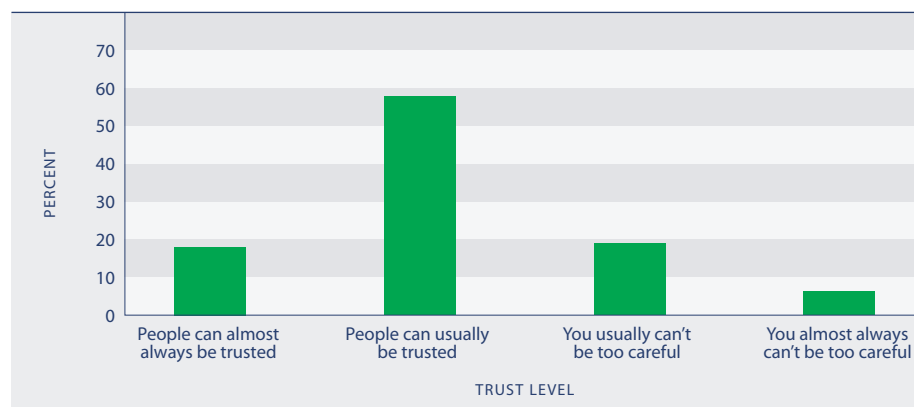
RELEVANCE

Trust in others is an important indicator of how people feel about members of their community. High levels of trust facilitate co-operative behaviour among people and contribute to people’s ability to develop positive relationships with others.

CURRENT LEVEL

In 2006, 76 percent of New Zealanders said they believed people can be trusted, with 18 percent reporting people can almost always be trusted and 58 percent reporting people can usually be trusted.

Figure SC3.1 **Levels of trust in other people, 2006**



Source: Quality of Life Survey 2006

AGE AND SEX DIFFERENCES

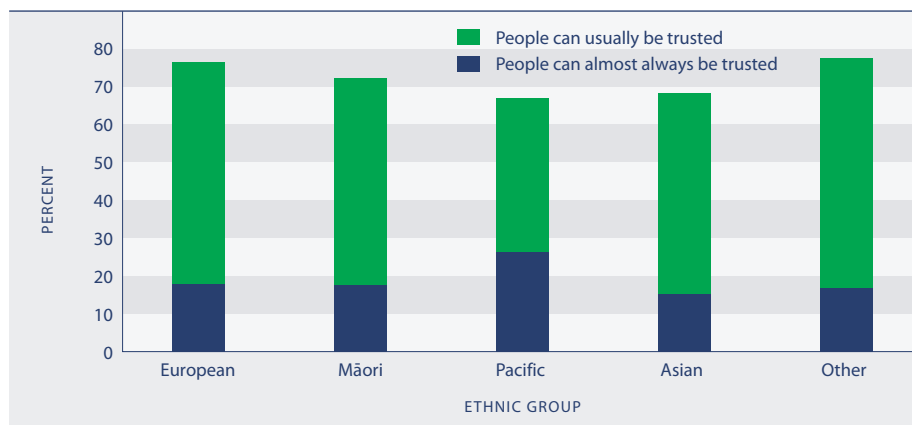
The proportion of those reporting people can be trusted was similar for males (75 percent) and females (76 percent). Nineteen percent of males and 17 percent of females agreed people can almost always be trusted and 56 percent of males and 59 percent of females responded people can usually be trusted.

Those reporting that people can almost always or usually be trusted ranged from 72 percent at ages 15–24 years to 78 percent for 50–64 year olds.

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

People in the European and Other (excluding Asian) ethnic groups reported a slightly higher level of trust in people (each 77 percent) than Māori (72 percent). Asian and Pacific peoples had the lowest proportions who felt people could be trusted (68 percent and 67 percent, respectively).

Figure SC3.2 **Proportion of people reporting that people can almost always or usually be trusted, by ethnic group, 2006**

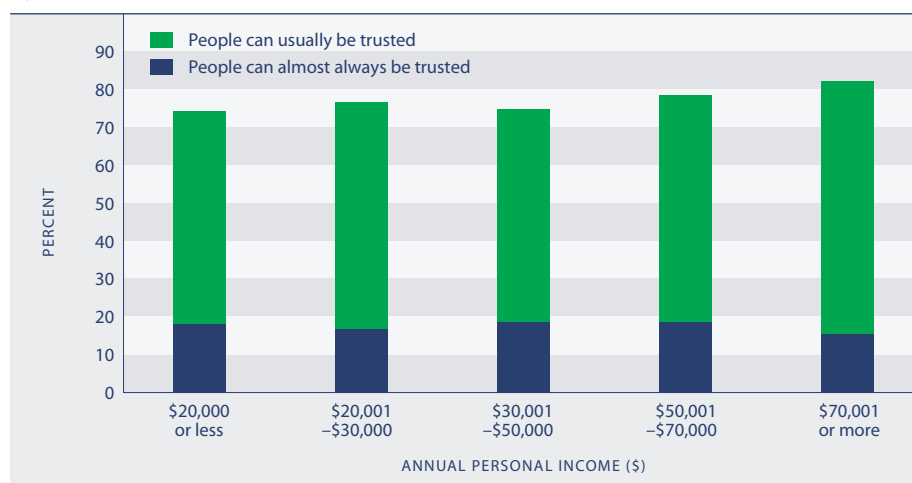


Source: Quality of Life Survey 2006

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

Across all income levels, a majority of New Zealanders indicated people could almost always or usually be trusted. Reported trust increased with personal income level. People with incomes over \$70,000 reported the highest overall level of trust (82 percent), while people with incomes of \$20,000 or less reported the lowest level (74 percent).

Figure SC3.3 **Proportion of people reporting that people can almost always or usually be trusted, by personal income, 2006**



Source: Quality of Life Survey 2006

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES Across all New Zealand's largest cities, a majority of New Zealanders indicated people could almost always or usually be trusted. Reported levels of trust were highest in Wellington and Dunedin (both 84 percent) and lowest in Waitakere (66 percent) and Manukau (68 percent).

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

New Zealanders' level of trust in other people in 2004 compares well with those of people in European Union countries in 2005, and to that of people in Canada in 2003. New Zealand had the seventh highest reported level of trust in other people (almost always trust or usually trust) out of 25 OECD countries.⁹⁴ New Zealand's reported level of trust in other people (69 percent) is above the OECD median of 56 percent. Norway had the highest reported level of trust in people (87 percent) followed by Denmark and Sweden (both 84 percent). Canada (53 percent) and the United Kingdom (55 percent) reported lower levels of trust in other people than New Zealand.

Loneliness

DEFINITION

The proportion of people aged 15 years and over who reported feeling isolated or lonely “sometimes”, “most of the time” or “always” during the previous 12 months, in the Quality of Life Survey 2006.

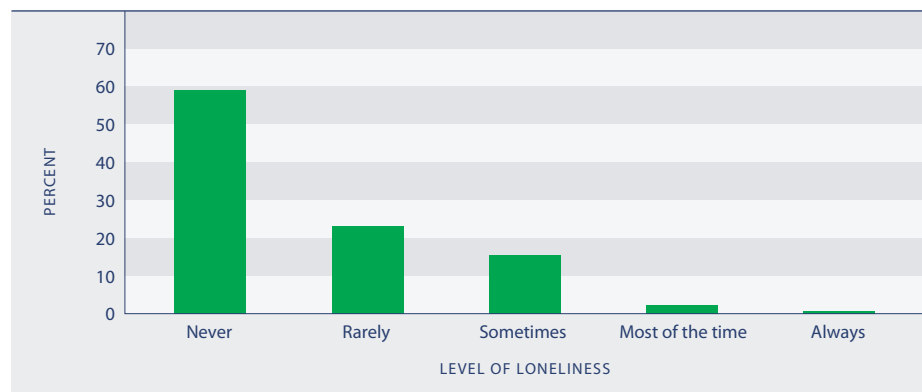
RELEVANCE

Social contact is fundamentally important to people: humans are social creatures. Self-assessed loneliness is a proxy indicator of whether people are happy with the amount and quality of social contact they have. As well as being an undesirable state in itself, loneliness may also contribute to poor outcomes in other areas, including adverse health problems such as stress, anxiety or depression.

CURRENT LEVEL

In 2006, 18 percent of New Zealanders reported feeling lonely during the last 12 months. Fifteen percent said they felt lonely sometimes, 2 percent said they were lonely most of the time and fewer than 1 percent said they always felt lonely. Feelings of isolation or loneliness are strongly associated with self-rated quality of life. Those who rated their quality of life as “extremely good” or “good” were far less likely to have felt isolated in the past 12 months (8 percent and 19 percent, respectively) than those who rated their quality of life as “poor” (60 percent).⁹⁵

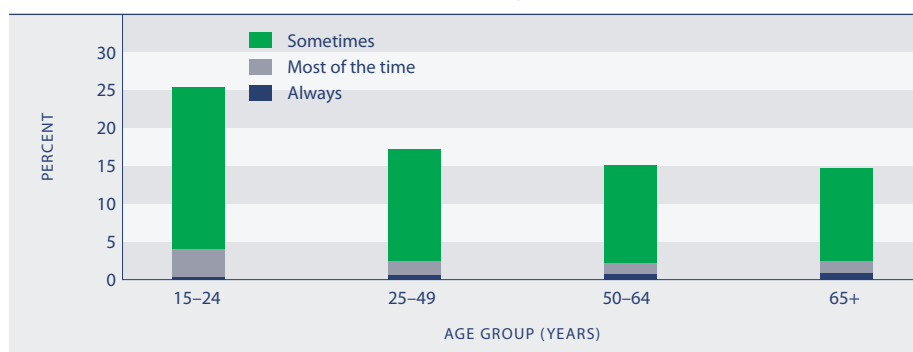
Figure SC4.1 **Proportion of people experiencing loneliness, 2006**



Source: Quality of Life Survey 2006

AGE DIFFERENCES

Loneliness is most prevalent among people aged 15–24 years, followed by those aged 25–49 years. Twenty-five percent of 15–24 year olds and 17 percent of those aged 25–49 years reported feeling lonely sometimes, most of the time, or always. Levels of loneliness were lower among those aged 50–64 years and 65 years and over (both 15 percent).

Figure SC4.2 **Proportion of people experiencing loneliness, by age, 2006**

Source: Quality of Life Survey 2006

SEX DIFFERENCES

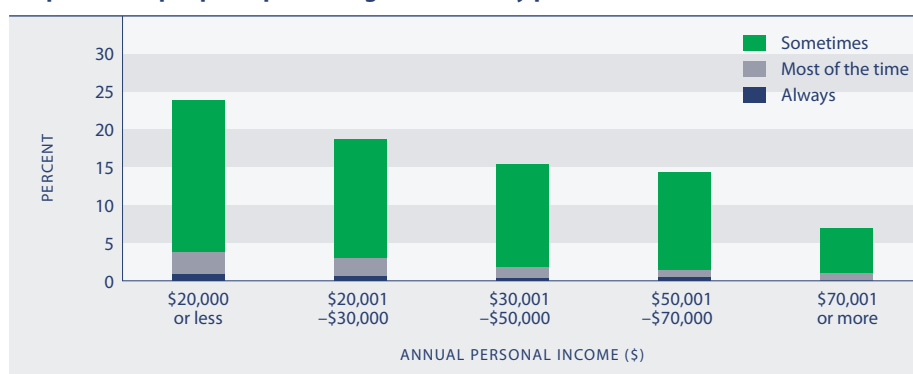
Females (20 percent) were more likely than males (16 percent) to have reported feeling lonely during the last 12 months. Seventeen percent of females said they were lonely sometimes compared to 14 percent of males.

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

Europeans reported the lowest rate of loneliness with 16 percent reporting they were lonely sometimes, most of the time or always. Eighteen percent of Māori, 22 percent of people in the Other (excluding Asian) ethnic group and 23 percent of Pacific peoples reported they were sometimes, most of the time or always lonely. Asian peoples (27 percent) reported the highest rates of loneliness.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES

Experiencing loneliness declines as personal income rises. People with personal incomes of \$20,000 or less reported higher rates of loneliness than people with higher incomes: 24 percent said they felt lonely sometimes, most of the time or always in the past 12 months. This compares with a loneliness rate of 7 percent for those with a personal income over \$70,000.

Figure SC4.3 **Proportion of people experiencing loneliness, by personal income, 2006**

Source: Quality of Life Survey 2006

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

People living in Manukau City had the highest reported incidence of loneliness with 21 percent reporting they felt lonely sometimes, most of the time or always. Those living in Dunedin had the lowest reported incidence of loneliness (12 percent).

Contact between young people and their parents

DEFINITION

The proportion of secondary school students aged 12–18 years who were able to spend enough time with Mum and/or Dad (or someone who acts as Mum and/or Dad) most weeks, as reported in Youth2000 – New Zealand Youth: A Profile of their Health and Wellbeing.

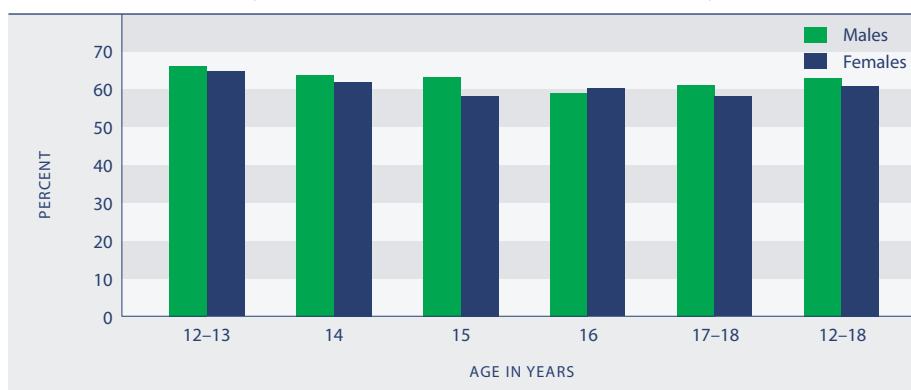
RELEVANCE

Healthy relationships are built through both the quantity and quality of time spent together. Young people having enough time with their parents is a proxy indicator of the extent to which those in need of care and nurturing receive appropriate support.

CURRENT LEVEL

In 2001, 63 percent of male secondary school students and 61 percent of female secondary school students reported that most weeks they were able to spend enough time with at least one parent.

Figure SC5.1 **Students reporting they spent enough time with their parent(s), by age and sex, 2001**



Source: Adolescent Health Research Group (2003a)

AGE DIFFERENCES

Girls at 15 years of age were less likely to report that most weeks they were able to spend enough time with Mum and/or Dad than younger boys and girls (12–13 years).

SEX DIFFERENCES

There were no significant differences by sex in the proportion of students reporting they spent enough time with at least one parent.

ETHNIC DIFFERENCES

Fifty-five percent of Māori students and 65 percent of European students reported that most weeks they were able to spend enough time with Mum and/or Dad. The difference was statistically significant after adjusting for age, sex and socio-economic differences between the two ethnic groups. Pacific students (60 percent), Asian students (65 percent) and students of the Other ethnic group (60 percent) showed no statistically significant difference from European students after adjusting for age, sex and socio-economic differences.