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## **Pastoral Care: A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescent Girls' Understanding of Health and Wellness Topics**

Melissa Holter  
*Edith Cowan University*

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Supervisors: Dr Andrew Guilfoyle  
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# Pastoral care: A Qualitative Exploration of Adolescent Girls' Understanding of Health and Wellness Messages.

Melissa Holter

School of Psychology and Social Science

Supervisor: Dr. Andrew Guilfoyle

# Introduction

- Adolescent girls encounter many health and wellness type issues on a daily basis- body image, diet and exercise, school pressure, family changes, growing closeness in friendships and the inevitable ripples within their peer groups.
- In response to this, many schools include programmes of ‘social and emotional learning’ in the curriculum, and many also offer after school programmes, whether they be intervention, remedial, empowerment or interest based (Durlack, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).
- Research indicates that these programmes hold many potential benefits for students’ social and emotional well-being, although some more so than others (Durlack, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010).
- In response to a lack of research exploring adolescent girls’ subjective, lived experience of engagement with, and understanding of, these types of programmes and the messages they contain, the following project was carried out.

# Research Design

## Methodology

- In the aim of understanding the lived experience of the participants as they engage in and make meaning from the programme (Laverty, 2003), the qualitative study was conducted within the hermeneutic phenomenology approach.
- The method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to link the text of participants' narratives to underlying meaning (Smith, 2010). In this process, the researcher is placed between text and interpretation, with their own context and experience forming a crucial part of the analysis (Smith, 2010).

# Research Design

## Participants

- 36 Year 7 and 8 boarding students attending a north-western suburbs boarding school in Perth, aged between 12 and 14 years.
- The girls took part in 8 weekly, one-hour sessions of a 'body and mind' programme delivering health and wellness messages.
- Students' completed questionnaires at the conclusion of each module, giving feedback and perceptions of the session topic.
- Focus groups were also conducted to discuss the issues presented, and interviews with 5 girls held at the end of the programme.

# Findings

- Themes of friendship, family connections, and self-concept ran throughout the girls' responses to questions, activities, and the material presented during the programme sessions.
- These themes were present whatever the session topic was based around; whether it be media expectations, managing social media, relating to boys, or friendship itself.
- Within the theme of friendship emerges notions of the sacred trust and confidence that the safe space of the relationship entails...

*“I think that you should be comfortable with your friends and be able to be yourself. They should accept you for who you are, help you when your sad and celebrate the good”*
- However, some of the responses also indicate an awareness of the changing nature of friendships, and the work required to maintain them...

# Findings

*“friendship is all about accepting your friends, you have to learn to love your friends for who they are and what they are. Master this and you’ll be the best friend”*

- Attachment bonds to family members were expressed largely in terms of social supports...

*“usually I just call my mum and talk to her, because she’s, like, always on my side and everything...”*

Even though the girls are away from their families, their relationships with them remain crucial to their wellbeing.

# Discussion

- Analysis of the participant narratives offers both valuable insight into the experiences of this group of young people, and also informs recommendations for future programme development and delivery.
- The importance of encouraging and developing relationships is clearly a crucial element to include in health and wellness programmes for this population- facilitate home-school links, promote inter-age mingling and friendships at school, use active and directed social skills training.
- Using an analogy of a social web, or some other interrelational construct, may be beneficial in the aim of building confidence, social skills, group cohesion, and self esteem.



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