

Insights From Data-Driven School Counselling:

Nurturing Student Well-Being.



Background

Student mental health is not only an important consideration for immediate wellbeing, but also for academic engagement, social engagement, physical health, family relationships, and long-term personal success. Supportive early intervention initiatives can have profound and long-term benefits across all areas of a student's life.

What questions we were trying to answer

- 1 What are the prevalent Counselling Issues for students in our Diocese?
- 2 Are we seeing any trends over time?

Methodology

Between 2017-2023 School Counsellors across 38 schools (8 secondary, 29 primary, 1 K-12 school) were asked to complete a quantitative data field when completing their electronic case notes from counselling sessions:

“What was the primary counselling issue for the session?”

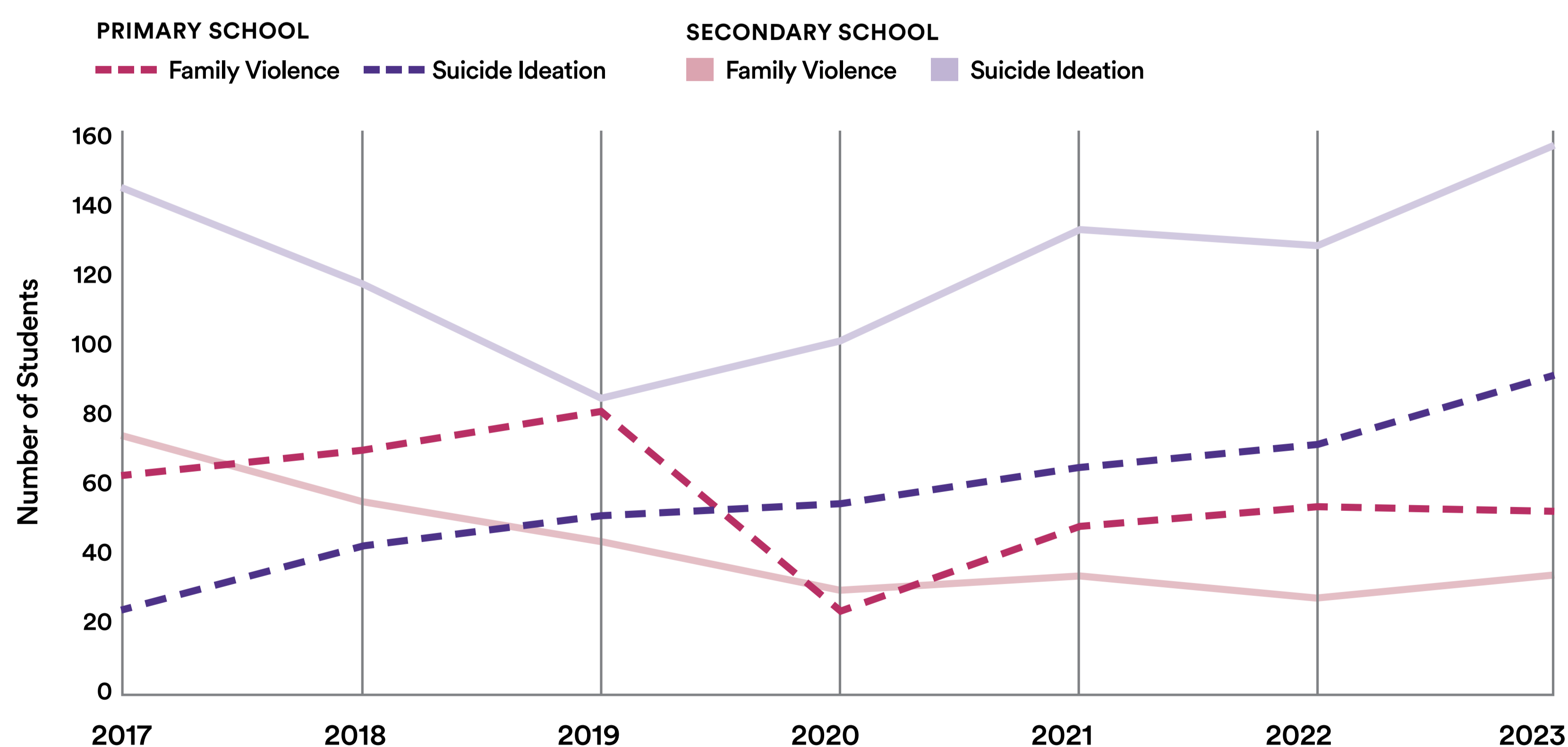
Sample Size & Population Demographics:

A gradual sample size increase can be observed, reflective of the program's growth in response to demand for services. Sample size in primary schools (ages 5-12 approx.) and secondary schools (ages 13-18 approx.) has remained comparable, despite a higher proportion of primary schools. This is explained by larger counselling ratios in secondary settings.

Year	Client Count	Female	Male	Other Gender	Primary School Aged	Secondary School Aged	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students
2017	1594	900	694	0	753	841	58
2018	1809	1026	779	4	827	982	66
2019	1784	993	790	1	886	898	75
2020	1535	924	610	1	821	833	74
2021	1657	978	663	16	830	827	83
2022	2031	1192	800	39	1067	964	86
2023	2217	1321	856	40	1139	1078	109

Risk of Harm Trends

While some counselling issues don't regularly feature in the Top 5, the counselling service still pays close attention to their trends due to associated impact to children/young people concerned. Two examples of such issues are Domestic/Family Violence and Suicide Ideation.



Discussion

While longitudinal data is invaluable for understanding trends and patterns over time, interpretations must consider evolving variables and complex influences.

Notable Social/Political/Environmental Events:

- 2020-2021** COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns, and school closures.
2019-2020 Significant Bushfires directly impacted regions in the Diocese.
2017 The same-sex marriage plebiscite, the #MeToo movement, & the bombing at an Ariana Grande concert.

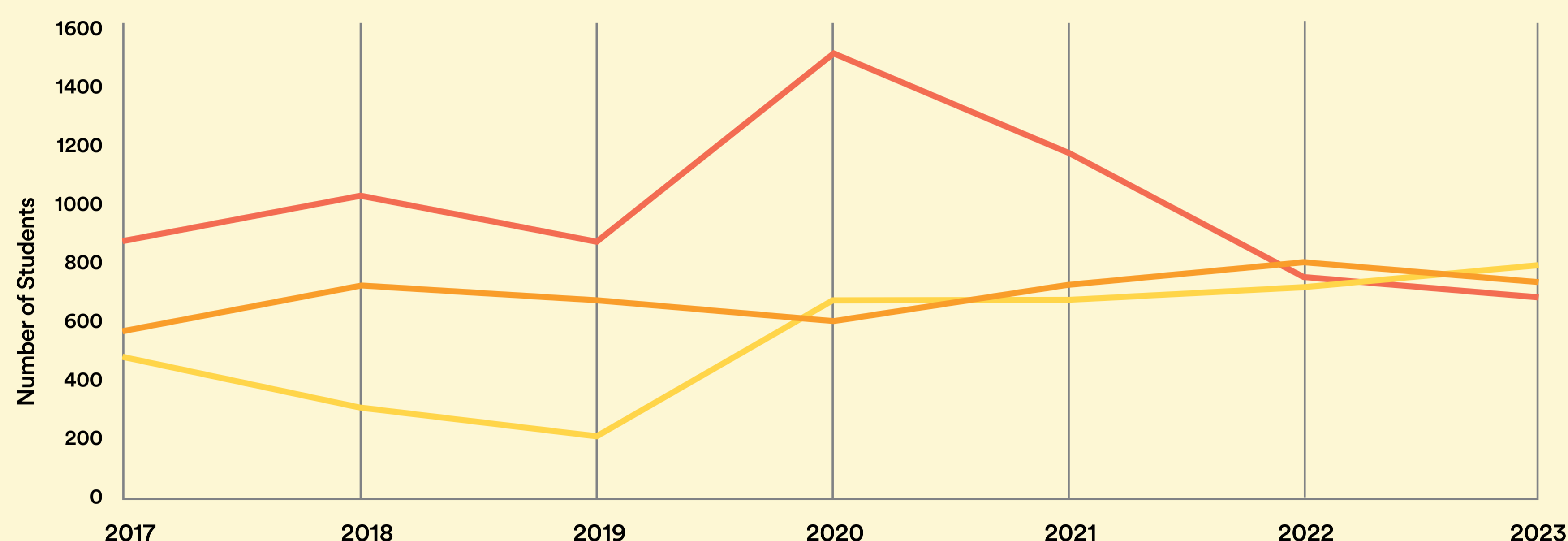
Key Findings

Across our Diocese, which includes the regions of Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Macarthur, and the Southern Highlands of NSW, the following counselling issues appeared in the Top 5 for at least 1 year over the 7 years from 2017 to 2023:



Of these, only 3 consistently appeared in the Top 5 every year

- Family Breakdown/Family Relationships
- Symptoms of Anxiety
- Peer Relationships



Primary vs Secondary Schools

When comparing the top 5 counselling issues in Primary and Secondary Schools, we see that both age groups present to counselling for support with: Family Breakdown/Family Relationships, Symptoms of Anxiety, Peer Relationships, Esteem/Confidence and Emotion Regulation.

In Secondary Schools Symptoms of Depression, Stress, and Suicide Ideation appear in the Top 5.

In Primary Schools Anger/Aggression appears in the Top 5, along with Behaviour Management/Behaviour Planning which does not appear in the Top 5 when looking at the whole diocese trends.

- 1 Family Breakdown/Family Relationships
- 2 Symptoms of Anxiety
- 3 Peer Relationships
- 4 Esteem/Confidence
- 5 Emotion Regulation

Primary School

Rank	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Symptoms of Anxiety	Peer Relationships
2	Symptoms of Anxiety	Symptoms of Anxiety	Symptoms of Anxiety	Peer Relationships	Symptoms of Anxiety	Emotion Regulation	Emotion Regulation
3	Peer Relationships	Anger/Aggression	Anger/Aggression	Emotion Regulation	Peer Relationships	Peer Relationships	Symptoms of Anxiety
4	Behaviour Management	Esteem/Confidence	Esteem/Confidence	Symptoms of Anxiety	Emotion Regulation	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships
5	Anger/Aggression	Behaviour Management	Emotion Regulation	Behaviour Support	Esteem/Confidence	Anger/Aggression	Anger/Aggression

Secondary School

Rank	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships	Family Breakdown/Family Relationships
2	Symptoms of Anxiety	Symptoms of Anxiety	Symptoms of Anxiety	Peer Relationships	Symptoms of Anxiety	Symptoms of Anxiety	Peer Relationships
3	Peer Relationships	Peer Relationships	Peer Relationships	Symptoms of Anxiety	Peer Relationships	Peer Relationships	Symptoms of Anxiety
4	Symptoms of Depression	Stress	Stress	Stress	Emotion Regulation	Emotion Regulation	Emotion Regulation
5	Stress	Symptoms of Depression	Esteem/Confidence	Emotion Regulation	Stress	Stress	Suicide Ideation

Implications for Practice

By analysing counselling data, we have been able to enhance our understanding of student needs and inform:

- 1 Targeted initiatives
- 2 Resource allocation
- 3 Program Improvement
- 4 Staff Training/Professional Development

Future Directions

Data will continue to be collected, alongside outcomes measurement tool findings, to better adapt services to students' evolving needs and improve outcomes.

Presented by
Chief Executive Officer, Michael Austin
Program Manager, Tina Acevska

To discuss this data
Clinical Project Lead, Leah Varley
Leahv@catholiccare.dow.org.au

For further information
Scan this QR code, or visit
catholiccare.dow.org.au

