



The charity for
girls' equality



REPRESENT US!

HOW DIVERSE ROLE MODELS
CAN TRANSFORM GIRLS' LIVES



ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL AUSTRALIA

We have a dream. She has a plan.

Put simply, we're the charity for girls' equality. We tackle the root causes of poverty, support communities through crisis, campaign for gender equality, and help governments do what's right for children and particularly for girls. We believe a better world is possible. An equal world; a world where all children can live happy and healthy lives, and where girls can take their rightful place as equals.

About this report

Plan International Australia, in collaboration with YouGov, conducted a poll with a representative online sample of 525 Australian girls and young women aged between 16 and 25 to gauge their attitudes on the power of role models and diverse representation.

Around 45% of respondents identified as being from a Culturally and Linguistically diverse (CALD) background, around 30% identified as LGBTQI+ and around 22% identified as having a disability.

The effective sample size after weighting is 449, and the theoretical margin of error is ± 4.6 percentage points. Due to rounding, totals for results may not add to 100.

FOREWORD

Who makes you believe your dreams are possible?

When I was a girl growing up in Canberra, I believed that anything was possible. My Indian born father and Australian born mother taught me that the future was mine to shape. But when I looked at popular culture and the media that didn't quite ring true.

There was nobody who looked like me on television. I remember devotedly watching Captain Planet with my little sister because there was a single Asian character. Where in Asia she was from wasn't deemed relevant enough to mention. She was simply from the continent – as a whole.

I had big plans and big dreams.

But not enough women on which to model them.

My experience is not unique. As the Plan International Australia survey in this report found, 60% of young women say they found it hard to find role models that reflected their diversities when growing up. Almost one quarter of women said they had no role models to look up to whatsoever. If you cannot be what you cannot see, then this has potentially dire consequences for girls.



The ripple of lifelong impacts that diverse representation leads to is profound. Plan International Australia's survey found that if girls and young women had more role models of diverse cultural backgrounds, gender identities, or disabilities when growing up, they believe it would have had an impact on their self-confidence (66%), career choices (56%), and education (52%).

66% of those with a disability said seeing more diversity in role models and seeing themselves represented in the famous people they looked up to would have positively impacted on their self-confidence. I became disabled myself in 2018. The shock and transition to a new way of living, and a new body to live in, was severe. I believe it would have been easier had I had greater access to disabled role models as a child.

Girls should grow up believing anything is possible. They deserve choices and opportunities. They should have power to shape the world they want to live in.

The global pandemic has robbed us all of many things – for some of us, our health, our incomes, our education or precious time with family and friends. Many have been devastated by this humanitarian crisis – tragically losing family members or suffering from COVID-19 themselves, as well as experiencing all of the devastating consequences of lockdowns.

For girls around the world, the impact of COVID-19 has been even deeper. The pandemic has had devastating impacts on girls' education in particular, unwinding decades of progress in getting girls enrolled in school, strengthening gender transformative curriculums and education systems and improving learning outcomes for them.

But perhaps one silver lining is that we are all connecting online in new and exciting ways. My disabled friends and I talk about the newfound energy and access we have now that attending or speaking at events no longer requires a physically draining commute. Mothers who have been denied flexibility are now operating in professions where working from home is the norm.

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At Future Women we've been delighted by the energy and enthusiasm shown by our members in the online space. While many miss the physical connection of being together, gathering online means they're able to do so more often and engage more deeply.

More than a third of the girls and young women surveyed told Plan International Australia that increased living online had enabled them to find and connect with more diverse role models that better reflected their own identities. This gives me enormous hope.

When people from underrepresented communities see themselves reflected in a person with power – someone making decisions and with a seat at the table – the consequences of that are incredible. These trailblazers not only help inspire our dreams, they help us carve out a path to make those dreams a reality.

Words like diversity can be quite buzzy, but the research has told us time and again that increased diversity – whether that's gender, cultural, body image or disability – makes a better workforce and a better society, and people are finally understanding the value of this.

I want our parliaments, television shows and news bulletins, our Olympic teams and our business leaders to reflect our community – a melting pot of cultures, religions and people.

As role models for young girls, we can all help ignite their belief in their own potential. Together, we can all help inspire girls in all their diversities to dream big. We can make sure that instead of seeing barriers, girls are met with support and empowerment when they turn to their role models..

It's time we all step up and commit to empowering the next generation of girls to make them believe their dreams are truly possible.

Jamila Rizvi

THE DATA

60%

of girls and young women found it hard to find role models that reflected their diversities when growing up.

23%

of girls and young women had **no role models to look up to whatsoever.**

82%

of **LGBTQI+** young women said more diversity in female role models would have had a positive impact on their self-confidence growing up.

But **COVID-19** and increased living online has made it easier for girls to connect with more diverse role models.

33%



of girls and young women aged 16-25 said that increased time online and on social media has helped them find diverse and like-minded role models they identify with.

For younger girls aged 16-18, that percentage jumped to 41%

65% of young women say their role models can today be found in the arts. ■ 59% are found on social media ■ 57% in the media ■ 54% in sport

“The online world is where girls are now living – and it has the potential to truly empower them. But we must ensure the support, safety and resources that girls in all their diversities need to exist and thrive in this new world are in place. – Susanne Legena, Plan International Australia CEO

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Continued over page

THE DATA

“Playing professional AFL footy – a sport that I want to recognise has indigenous origins – has really changed my life. I want to give all girls and young women – especially those from a diverse background like me – **hope to know that they can do whatever it is they want to do.** The more young African girls they see, the more Asian girls they see being represented on a level playing field normalises it. The more communities reflected in the AFL, the easier it becomes.

– Akec Makur Chuot, AFLW player

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"Until I saw the politician Mehreen Faruqi, I did not believe a brown, Muslim woman could make it in the Australian political system. Until I saw Antoinette Lattouff, I did not think women of colour could go into Australian television. Me – with all my privileges – felt that I did not belong. That's the power of diverse and inclusive representation. It's not a checkbox. It's personal!"

– Mariam Mohammed, MoneyGirl founder

Young women said that if they had role models of diverse cultural backgrounds, gender identities, or disabilities this would have had an impact on their:

▪ self-confidence (66%) ▪ career choices (56%) ▪ education (52%)

26%
of young women said they did not believe there were any diverse female role models in politics.

66%

of those with a disability said seeing themselves represented in the famous people they looked up to would have positively impacted on their self confidence.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If young women and girls are educated, supported and inspired by those they look up to – and society as a whole – they can become a powerful force for social change. The survey not only demonstrates why it is crucial for girls to see diverse leadership and representation, but also points to the ways women can be more visible and supportive role models for girls, younger women and gender-diverse youth.

Almost half of respondents said they would like to see female role models prioritise providing mentorship (49%), speak against discrimination (46%), and celebrate the achievements of diverse women (45%).

Young women who come from households where they speak a language other than English are especially keen to see female role models speaking out about discrimination (56%, compared to 42% of young women from an English-speaking background).

We know that role models are only one part of the solution to achieving equality for girls and young women. Alongside this we must:

▪ Nurture girls' leadership ambitions and give them a seat at the decision-making table

Governments should invest in young women's emerging leadership programs in Australian high schools, to provide skills, networks and mentorship to girls to become leaders across government, business and civic life. Politicians, business leaders and media companies should offer paid internships to high school aged girls and other underrepresented groups.

▪ Ensure every girl has access to education – an educated girl is a force to be reckoned with.

Education is a human right and should be accessible, appropriate and free. National governments worldwide must ensure education is accessible and that girls are not being excluded from their right to learn, and this should be supported and prioritised by aid donor governments such as Australia.



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