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‘Troubling’ survey sparks call to raise student allowances

A large percentage of university students are skipping meals and struggling to pay for educational resources due to a lack of income, according to new research by the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) released today.

The survey of more than 130 social work student members of the AASW reveals that 30 per cent of students have skipped meals because they have run out of money, a figure which rises to almost 50 per cent if they are dependent on government allowances.

Students are also struggling to pay for clothing (29 per cent), accommodation (20 per cent), transport (30 per cent) and medication (22 per cent). For those on allowance, the figures rise to 46 per cent for clothing, 37 per cent for accommodation, 56 per cent for transport and 41 per cent for medication.

The survey also examined whether income affects students’ ability to complete their studies. Thirty-seven per cent of students reported they did not have enough money to pay for textbooks or recommended educational resources, a figure which rises to 59 per cent for students on allowances. Further, 33 per cent of students reported being overtired from long hours in part time jobs rising to 39 per cent for those on allowances.

President of the AASW Karen Healy said the survey results are “deeply troubling.”

“This shows how lack of income is affecting high numbers of students as well as adversely affecting educational outcomes,” Professor Healy said.

“The survey highlights the need to immediately raise the level of Youth Allowance, Newstart Allowance, Abstudy and Austudy to above the poverty line, as well as widen eligibility. If we are serious about becoming a smart country, we cannot continue to treat students as second class citizens.”

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