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Homework takes its toll, study finds

By Erica Cervini
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Year 12 students in Victoria are doing excessive amounts of homework, which is causing them stress, according to a study.

The Victoria University study is one of the first to examine the link between year 12 homework and stress. A paper on the research is published in the latest edition of *Psychological Reports*, an international academic journal.

Researchers Gerard Kennedy and Nadya Kouzma, who wrote the paper based on their two-year study of VCE stress, found that year 12 students spent from 10 to 65 hours a week on homework. The average was 37.

Girls spent an average of 39 hours a week completing homework, whereas boys did 34.

The 37-hour average exceeds homework recommendations issued last year by the State Government. These guidelines suggest that year 10 to 12 students should spend between 90 minutes and three hours on study each weeknight, and up to six hours at the weekend during peak VCE periods.

The Victoria University researchers define homework as study done outside school hours.

Dr Kennedy and Ms Kouzma surveyed almost 400 year 12 students from government and private schools across Victoria on their study habits, stress levels and moods.

The pair found that students who spent many hours on homework had less time for family, friends and hobbies, which resulted in stress.

"These results indicate that homework may have a direct or an indirect influence on students' psychological well-being," the researchers said in their paper. They also found that year 12 girls scored significantly higher than boys on stress and mood disturbance.

Ms Kouzma told *The Sunday Age* that Victoria University chose to do the research because of concern about VCE stress. She said further research was needed to establish if a lack of time management was a major reason for students spending so much time on homework.

However, Ms Kouzma believed there were school expectations that students cope with large amounts of homework. Ms Kouzma surveyed teachers on how much homework should be given to year 12 students and found that they recommended from 21 to 32 hours a week.

Ian Newbegin, the author of *The Australian Study Guide*, said he was not surprised that year 12 students were spending copious amounts of time doing homework.

Dr Newbegin, who is also a teacher at Overnewton Anglican Community College in Taylors Lakes, said many schools and parents were guilty of placing pressure on students to work hard to gain high ENTER scores for university places.

However, Dr Newbegin said some of the pressure could be alleviated if students had better time-management skills and learnt relaxation skills, something the year 12s at Overnewton will be learning this week in preparation for their VCE exams.

This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/10/19/1034561354294.html>