

# Behavioral difficulties at school may lead to lifelong health and social problems

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Adolescents who misbehave at school are more likely to have difficulties throughout their adult lives, finds a 40-year study of British citizens published on [bmj.com](http://bmj.com) today. These difficulties cover all areas of life, from mental health to domestic and personal relationships to economic deprivation.

Severe behavioural problems in schools affect about 7% of 9-15 year olds and have been on the increase for the past 30 years. Previous studies have shown that individuals with severe conduct problems place a significant burden on society in terms of crime as well as the additional needs of education, health and welfare.

Ian Colman, an Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research Population Health Investigator, and Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta's School of Public Health, and his colleagues examined the health and social problems of adults who had mild and severe behavioural problems as adolescents. The findings are based on more than 3,500 individuals taking part in the Medical Research Council National Survey of Health and Development (the British 1946 birth cohort), over a 40-year period. All the participants were aged between 13 and 15 at the start of the study. Approximately a quarter of the participants had mild behavioural problems.

Participants were rated by their teachers as having severe, mild or no conduct problems and were followed up between the ages of 36 and 53 when they were asked about their mental health, and social and

economic status.

The results reveal disturbing new information about the societal impact of milder behavioural problems.

They show that the participants with severe or mild conduct problems in adolescence were more likely to leave school with no qualifications and go on to suffer a number of problems in adulthood including depression and anxiety, divorce, teenage pregnancy, and financial problems that continued throughout adult life.

These results held true even after taking into account predictors of outcomes in adulthood such as sex, father's social class, adolescent depression and anxiety and cognitive ability.

Interestingly, unlike previous studies in the field, these findings show that most of the participants who were badly behaved at school did not have alcohol problems as they got older.

Colman and his team conclude: "Given the long-term costs to society, and the distressing impact on the adolescents themselves, our results might have considerable implications for public health policy."

Source: British Medical Journal

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