

Do labour market trends worsen mental health in the young?

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Mental health in young people worsens in line with trends in the labour market. Researchers writing in the open access journal *BMC Public Health* studied data from 1985 to 2002 and found that, across ten European countries, as the proportion of young people not in work increased, so did the proportion of 15-year-olds who reported mental health symptoms such as feeling low, difficulty sleeping or headaches.

Anton Lager at CHESS, Stockholm University/Karolinska Institutet and the Swedish National Institute of [Public Health](#), SNIPH, carried out the research together with Sven Bremberg, SNIPH. Lager said, “[Labour market](#) trends may have contributed to the deteriorating trend in mental health among young people. A true relationship, should other studies confirm it, would be an important aspect to take into account when forming Labour market policies or policies concerning the delivery of higher education”.

The researchers obtained information on the rate of mental health problems from the WHO study [Health Behaviour](#) in School-aged Children (HBSC), which started in 1983/84. This information was compared to labour market data taken from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Spain, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland and Wales over the period 1985 to 2002. According to Lager, “Changes in the proportion of 15-to-24-year-olds not in the Labour force were significantly associated with mean changes in the proportion of 15-year-olds with mental health symptoms, both in boys and in girls. This suggests that changes in the national Labour market situation for young

people might have contributed to the deteriorating trends in mental health”.

Speculating as to the reasons for the association, Lager said, “Poorer job prospects will affect young people in general. Obviously, [young people](#) graduating from school with low grades are especially vulnerable. Yet, even before that, adolescents might be influenced. If job prospects are poor, they know that they have to stay longer in school, regardless of their interest in education. These phenomena might not be apparent in young adolescents when a job is in the distant future but might appear at the end of compulsory schooling”.

More information: Association between labour market trends and trends in young people's [mental health](#) in ten European countries 1983-2005; Anton CJ Lager and Sven G Bremberg; *BMC Public Health* (in press)

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