

A healthy mind makes a healthy body in teens

July 8 2010

Happier youths are also healthier youths, according to Emily Shaffer-Hudkins and her team, from the University of South Florida in the US. Adolescents' positive emotions and moods, as well as their satisfaction with life, could be more important than their anxiety or depression levels for predicting their physical health, they argue. Looking at teenagers' so-called 'subjective well-being' could help identify those likely to develop health problems in the future and target them with appropriate prevention strategies. Shaffer-Hudkins' work is published in Springer's journal *Applied Research in Quality of Life*.

To date, the majority of the research looking at the relationship between mental health and [physical health](#) in young people has focused primarily on how symptoms of poor mental health, or psychopathology, such as [anxiety](#) and [depression](#), relate to physical functioning. This approach fails to take into account the potential influence of positive indicators of mental health, such as positive emotions and mood states and life satisfaction, known as subjective well-being.

Shaffer-Hudkins' study is the first to look at both positive and negative indicators of mental health in relation to physical health in a sample of 401 students in grades 6-8 from a suburban southeastern middle school in the United States. The teenagers rated their satisfaction with life, whether they had recently felt excited, strong and proud (positive affect) as well as lonely, guilty and sad (negative affect). They were also asked about feeling withdrawn, anxious and depressed and about delinquent and [aggressive behavior](#) (all indicators of psychopathology). Finally, they

told researchers about their physical health.

Overall, perceived good physical health was strongly linked to [life satisfaction](#) and feeling excited, strong and proud. Those who said they felt lonelier, guiltier, more anxious and depressed and who were more likely to display undesirable behaviors reported being less healthy physically. More specifically, mental health indicators explained 30 percent of the difference in physical health ratings and four out of the five mental health indicators were unique predictors of physical health. Positive affect in particular had the greatest effect.

In light of these findings, the authors argue that both positive and negative indicators of mental health need to be considered when developing a comprehensive model of mental health. Wellness models need to be holistic with a joint mind and body approach.

They conclude: "Findings from the current study underscore the importance of attending to positive wellness-focused indicators of mental health among youth. Subjective well-being is a significant, unique, and primary predictor of important physical health outcomes in youth and is more strongly associated with physical functioning than is psychopathology. Examining only psychopathology may lead to an underestimation of the relationship between mental health and physical health in young people."

More information: Shaffer-Hudkins E et al (2010). How adolescents' mental health predicts their physical health: unique contributions of indicators of subjective well-being and psychopathology. Applied Research in Quality Life; [DOI 10.1007/s11482-010-9105-7](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-010-9105-7)

Provided by Springer

Citation: A healthy mind makes a healthy body in teens (2010, July 8) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-07-healthy-mind-body-teens.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.