

Unhappy children turn to sex and alcohol

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Young children who don't like school are more likely to be involved in underage drinking and sexual activity. A study reported in BioMed Central's open access journal *Substance Abuse, Treatment, Prevention and Policy*, has found that pupils' general wellbeing and specific satisfaction with school were both associated with the incidence of risky behaviors.

Professor Mark Bellis worked with a team of researchers from the Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University, to carry out the study in more than 3500 11-14 year olds from 15 schools in the North West of England. He said, "As young as 13 years old, children who drink alcohol are much more likely to have had sex. The more they drink, the higher the risks of early sexual behavior. However, here we have looked at the relationships, not just between [alcohol consumption](#) and [sexual behavior](#), but also at how these behaviors relate to their feelings about school and home life".

The authors assessed general wellbeing by asking children about how happy they were with the way they looked, how well they got on with their parents, whether they felt they could be assertive and whether they often felt remorse. School-related wellbeing was assessed by questions about liking school, how their teachers treat them, and involvement with school rules.

According to the authors, the study found that children stating a dislike of school had 2.5-fold higher odds of having any sexual relationship. Dislike of school also strongly predicted alcohol use.

Speaking about the results, Professor Bellis said, "Our study identifies that the children who drink and are sexually active are also more likely to be unhappy with their school and home lives. Such children can become disengaged from both family and educational support and risk progressing to sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancies or becoming an [alcohol](#) related casualty at an accident and emergency unit".

"This study paints a clear picture that the [children](#) we most need to support are often the hardest to reach through conventional educational and parental routes."

More information: Wellbeing, alcohol use and sexual activity in young teenagers: findings from a cross-sectional survey in school children in North West England, Penelope A Phillips-Howard, Mark A Bellis, Linford B Briant, Hayley Jones, Jennifer Downing, Imogen E Kelly, Timothy Bird and Penny A Cook, Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy (in press), www.substanceabusepolicy.com/

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