

Adolescent expectations of early death predict young adult socioeconomic status

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(Medical Xpress) -- Adolescents' expectations of an early death can predict their economic futures more than a decade later, according to a new study from the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health.

Individuals who did not expect to live to age 35 had lower levels of [educational attainment](#) and lower personal earnings as [young adults](#) when compared to individuals who expected longer lives. Even after controlling for characteristics such as violence involvement, drug use, [parental education](#) and neighborhood poverty, those who perceived a short [life expectancy](#) were 73 percent more likely to have only a [high school education](#) than those who expected long lives.

The study suggests that low perceived survival expectations reported early in life may be a marker for worse health trajectories later in life. Screening for these perceptions in early life, along with other psychosocial characteristics, may assist in the identification of youth at risk of giving up on education and careers.

"In the United States, disparities in morbidity and mortality are closely linked to differences in education and income," said Quynh Nguyen, PhD, the study's lead author and recent graduate from the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health. "So improving the survival perceptions of adolescents may, in the long run, help decrease [health disparities](#)."

The study findings were published online April 3 in the journal [Social Science & Medicine](#).

While previous studies had linked anticipation of an early death to risk behaviors in adolescence, this is the first study to show perceived survival as a predictor of socioeconomic status among adults ages 24 to 32, a time in the human life span when socioeconomic status typically is more stabilized.

"People who have fatalistic beliefs about the future may set fewer goals, seek less guidance and attempt fewer solutions to their problems," Nguyen said. "The creation of environments that allow for healthy youth development - schools with resources and neighborhoods low in poverty and crime - could play an important role in raising survival expectations."

The study compared data collected from 19,000 adolescents in 1994-1995 to follow-up data collected from the same respondents 13 years later. One in seven adolescents in grades 7 through 12 reported perceiving a 50-50 chance or less of living to age 35. The cohort was part of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), conducted by the Carolina Population Center and funded by the National Institutes of Health and 23 other federal agencies and foundations.

More information: [www.sciencedirect.com/science/ ...
ii/S0277953612001116](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0277953612001116)

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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