

Healthy lifestyles linked to extra schooling

February 3 2014, by Nattavudh (Nick) Powdthavee



Staying in school for longer increases a person's chance of leading a healthy life, a University of Melbourne study has determined.

Researchers Professor Nattavudh Powdthavee and Dr Jinhu Li analysed what affect an additional 12 months schooling had on a person's diet, exercise and [health habits](#).

"The influence was rather substantial," said Professor Powdthavee, from the University's Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research.

"An extra year of education increased the likelihood a person will lead a [healthy life](#) by about 17 per cent, compared to an [average person](#)."

However, it remains unclear exactly why this is the case. One theory is that higher educated people often go on to earn more money and can afford more quality foods and fitness activities.

The analysis was done using data from the annual HILDA Survey, a [longitudinal study](#) that's tracked the life experiences of thousands of Australian households since 2001.

HILDA responses gave researchers data on how often Australians consumed fruit, vegetables or fatty foods, and how often they engage in exercise, binge drinking and smoking cigarettes.

A change in minimum schooling requirements in some states allowed researchers to measure the difference an extra year can make.

Past studies have noted a link between education and a healthy lifestyle, but this is one of the first Australian studies to demonstrate a causal link.

"We're not just saying educated Australians lead healthier lives, we're saying they do so because of their level of education," Professor Powdthavee said.

The research report—Does Increasing Schooling Improve Later Health Habits? Evidence from the School Reforms in Australia—also demonstrated that increased schooling raised an individuals' perceived sense of control over their life.

"People who remained in school for longer tended to be conscientious individuals or individuals who have a higher perceived sense of control over their [life](#)," according to Professor Powdthavee

"This applies for both men and women."

More information: "Does Increasing Schooling Improve Later Health Habits? Evidence from the School Reforms in Australia." Jinhua Li and Nattavudh Powdthavee. Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, January 2014. ISSN 1447-5863

Provided by University of Melbourne

Citation: Healthy lifestyles linked to extra schooling (2014, February 3) retrieved 1 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-02-healthy-lifestyles-linked-extra-schooling.html>

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