

# Education may not improve our life chances of happiness

March 25 2015

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Credit: Bill Kuffrey/public domain

Getting a good education may not improve your life chances of happiness, according to new mental health research from the University of Warwick.

In a new study published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, researchers from Warwick Medical School examined socioeconomic factors related

to high mental wellbeing, such as level of education and personal finances.

Low educational attainment is strongly associated with mental illness but the research team wanted to find out if higher educational attainment is linked with mental wellbeing.

The team found all levels of educational attainment had similar odds of high mental well-being.

High mental wellbeing was defined as 'feeling good and functioning well'. People with high levels of mental wellbeing manage to feel happy and contented with their lives more often than those who don't because of the way they manage problems and challenges especially in relationships with others.

Lead author Professor Sarah Stewart-Brown said: "These findings are quite controversial because we expected to find the [socioeconomic factors](#) that are associated with mental illness would also be correlated with mental wellbeing. So if low educational attainment was strongly associated with mental illness, high [educational attainment](#) would be strongly connected to mental well-being. But that is not the case."

Other surprising results from the study included high levels of mental wellbeing among Afro-Caribbeans, especially men.

Professor Stewart-Brown said: "Given the well-recognised association between ethnicity and detention under the Mental Health Act and the more general associations between mental illness and ethnicity, we were very surprised to find substantially increased odds of high mental well-being among minority ethnic groups, particularly African and African-Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani groups."

The team used existing data from the Health Survey for England (HSE) for 2010 and 2011 in which the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) was administered to 17,030 survey participants across both years.

Professor Stewart-Brown added that the correlates of high mental well-being are different from those of low mental well-being, but the latter closely mirror the correlates of mental illness.

She said: "Assumptions about socioeconomic determinants made in planning public [mental health](#) programmes focusing on the prevention of [mental illness](#) may therefore not be applicable to programmes aiming to increase mental well-being."

**More information:** 'Socioeconomic gradients and mental health: implications for public health', *British Journal of Psychiatry*, Sarah Stewart-Brown, Dr Preshila Chandimali Samaraweera, Dr Frances Taggart, Dr Kandala Ngianga-Bakwin and Dr Saverio Stranges.

Provided by University of Warwick

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