

A supportive close friendship helps boys and girls overcome adversity

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A single supportive close friendship can help young people from low-income backgrounds to thrive in challenging circumstances, according to a new University of Sussex study.

The research, led by psychologist Dr Rebecca Graber, is published today, Thursday 25 June, in the *British Journal of Psychology*.

Young people from low-income areas typically face substantial challenges to good physical health, mental health, academic achievement and employment.

Previous research has linked these challenges to involvement with peers and membership of larger friendship groups - particularly among boys - but has not looked at whether [young people](#)'s best friendships could positively contribute to [resilience](#): self-reliance, a balanced perspective on life, and the ability to make meaning from difficult circumstances.

Dr Graber, together with Professor Rhiannon Turner from Queen's University in Belfast and Professor Anna Madill from the University of Leeds, surveyed 409 student aged between 11 and 19 from three schools and two colleges in Yorkshire serving catchment areas with poor socioeconomic status.

The participating students completed psychological assessments of the quality of their closest friendship, their resilience in the face of adverse experiences, and how they typically coped with problems.

Both boys' and girls' best friendships facilitated effective ways of coping (such as planning, reframing an issue in a positive way and using emotional support) that helped them develop resilience to complex challenges.

A significant gender difference also emerged: counterintuitively, girls' best friendships had a slight tendency to promote risky and ineffective ways of coping with adversity (such as self-blame and substance use), but boys' best friendships did not.

Dr Graber said: "Research into promoting resilience in young people has concentrated on support from the family, but friendships are important too. Boys' and girls' best friendships are an important source of meaning and strength in the face of substantial adversity.

"There has also been almost a distrust of friendship between boys, with research concentrating on the negative side of belonging to a gang. But that isn't the whole story.

"Our research suggests that [boys'](#) best [friendships](#) may be intimate, trustworthy and supportive, even as they face social pressures towards a stoic or macho masculinity."

More information: *British Journal of Psychology*, [DOI: 10.1111/bjop.12135](#)

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