

Dropouts face a tough road, but support services can change results

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Jennifer Lansford is a research professor at the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy. Photo credit: Duke University

Certain life experiences can worsen the negative effects of dropping out of school, but interventions and treatments can improve the odds for dropouts, a new study finds.

The study, available online today in the June edition of *Journal of Adolescent Health*, followed 585 children from [age](#) 5 to age 27. It looked at what factors elevated children's risk of dropping out, how [high school](#) dropouts fared later in life and what factors prevented negative

outcomes.

The participants were from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and lived in Knoxville and Nashville, Tennessee, and Bloomington, Indiana. By age 24, 14 percent of participants had dropped out and had not received a GED, comparable to national statistics.

Researchers found that, compared to high school graduates, the dropouts were three times more likely to have been arrested by age 18 and four times as likely to need government assistance by age 27. They were also twice as likely to be fired from a job two or more times, to have used drugs in the past six months and to report [poor health](#) by age 27.

In addition, most dropouts faced multiple hardships as adults, not just one. Researchers found dropouts were 24 times more likely than [high school graduates](#) to experience four or more negative outcomes by age 27.

However, researchers found the risk for negative life outcomes for dropouts - such as getting arrested, needing government assistance, being fired or having poor health -declined if they received treatment for behavioral, emotional or drug problems by age 24.

"It suggests that treatment can serve as a turning point," said lead researcher Jennifer E. Lansford, a Duke University research professor of public policy and a faculty fellow of the university's Center for Child and Family Policy. "It could make it more likely for you to hold a job or not be in jail. It's evidence that these kinds of treatments can work."

Researchers also found dropouts suffered more problems in later life if they were rejected by classmates in elementary school or became parents themselves at a young age. Improving peer relationships in elementary schools and reducing teen pregnancies are thus worthy investments and

may even help reduce the drop-out rate, the authors suggest.

More information: Jennifer E. Lansford et al, A Public Health Perspective on School Dropout and Adult Outcomes: A Prospective Study of Risk and Protective Factors From Age 5 to 27 Years, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.01.014](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.01.014)

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