

Study suggests risky aspects of teen brains can be tamed by circumstances

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An international team of researchers has found that despite having brains

that make them more risk-prone, recklessness by teens is not an inevitable part of adolescence. In their paper published in the journal *Developmental Science*, the group describes how they surveyed teenagers from around the world to learn more about adolescent behavior and their results compared with recent findings regarding the teenage brain.

Most everyone knows that teenagers take more risks than older people and sometimes engage in behaviors that seem completely illogical. Some have suggested it is just a part of growing up, that teens have not been around long enough to grasp the magnitude of their actions or to fully understand how serious repercussions can be. But recent research by several teams has found that there are biological reasons for teen recklessness—the parts of the brain that yearn for thrill seeking mature sooner than the parts that are in charge of making rational decisions, leaving teens seemingly at the mercy of their whims. But in this new effort, the research team has found that having a risk-prone brain does not necessarily mean that teens are unable to control themselves.

The team surveyed over 5,000 adolescents and young adults from around the globe—including Asia, Africa, Europe, and North and South America—asking them about their desires, behaviors and their histories. In looking at the data, the team found that teens everywhere experience the desire to engage in risky behavior, but differ markedly in how they react to it. In some countries, teens refrained from drinking, for example, while in others, such as the U.S., [teens](#) drank at will. The difference, the researchers found, was culture and opportunity. It would be difficult for a teenager in a country that has banned the sale of [alcoholic beverages](#) to act out by getting drunk. But it would also be less likely for a teen to do so who has grown up in a culture that is wary of teen freedom—where all adults feel they are part of the process of raising young people in a given community.

The researchers concluded that the context in which children grow up

has a major impact on the degree to which a teenager will give in to his or her desires, which suggests that teenagers are able to control their whims given sufficient motivation.

More information: Laurence Steinberg et al. Around the world, adolescence is a time of heightened sensation seeking and immature self-regulation, *Developmental Science* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/desc.12532](https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.12532)

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