

Bold new income strategy could help tackle mental health crisis among young people

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Researchers at the University of York played a key role in a major new study which suggests that universal basic income could help to reverse the epidemic of mental health problems among young people in the U.K.

Soaring living costs are causing unprecedented pressure on U.K. households, resulting in a dramatic increase in the number of people suffering from [mental health](#) conditions such as anxiety and depression—particularly among 16- to 24-year-olds.

A new Royal Society of Arts report, compiled by a team which included Professor Kate Pickett, of the Department of Health Sciences, and Professor Richard Cookson, of the Center for Health Economics at York, explores the introduction of universal basic [income](#) (UBI) as an alternative to conventional policy options.

Public support

Under the UBI scheme, every U.K. citizen would receive regular payments to support their [basic needs](#) and provide them with a level of financial security. This addresses a frequent criticism of the existing welfare system: that it does not support those who are aspirational, hard-working and responsible.

The research reveals that:

- UBI is economically feasible,
- that it can prevent or delay a wide range of health conditions
- that it is particularly effective in mitigating the mental health pandemic among [young people](#)
- that [public support](#) for UBI is strong, especially in the "red wall" constituencies of Wales, the Midlands and North of England.

Epidemic

Professor Pickett said, "We really do have an epidemic of mental health problems among young adults in our society. This has been made worse

by the COVID-19 pandemic and you can only imagine it is going to become worse in the current economic crisis.

"UBI would raise the income floor for a lot of people, reduce inequality and take away some of the sources of anxiety which young people particularly find so challenging. It would also save massively on costs to the NHS and other services."

Professor Cookson added, "There is already overwhelmingly strong evidence that reducing poverty and income insecurity in childhood and adolescence can improve mental health; our work using up-to-date data tells U.K. policy makers by how much."

Anxiety and depression

The project, which began in August 2021, involved detailed modeling work using links between income and anxiety and depression, a series of focus groups to gauge young adults' views on UBI as well as a series of surveys in "red wall" constituencies to assess support for universal basic income.

The research is part of a project called "[Assessing the Prospective Impacts of universal basic income \(UBI\) on anxiety and depression among 14- to 24-year-olds.](#)" It serves as a [pilot study](#) for a broader, long-term examination of the role of [universal basic income](#) as a public health measure.

Provided by University of York

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