

Adolescent mental health problems can translate into GP costs in adulthood

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Conduct and emotional problems in adolescents today could cost the NHS nearly £630,000 in annual cost of GP visits alone in adulthood, says new research published in the journal *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric*

Epidemiology.

The study found that conduct and emotional problems in adolescents, particularly when they exist together, are linked with relatively high GP costs in adulthood.

The researchers analyzed data from three birth cohorts born in single weeks in 1946, 1958 and 1970. Each cohort's rate of use of GP services in adulthood were examined to calculate different estimates for the future primary care costs of U.K. adolescents.

For example, by extrapolating from the most recent cohort of adolescents studied, who were born in 1970, young people today experiencing emotional and conduct problems together will create an extra 6,500 visits per year to the GP in adulthood at an [annual cost](#) of nearly £250,000 by the time they are 50 years old. Conduct problems alone will lead to nearly 3200 extra GP visits and cost £125,000. Emotional problems alone will lead to 6,300 extra GP visits, costing £247,000.

Dr. Derek King, assistant professorial research fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and lead author of the research said, "Our figures foreshadow the true costs of mental health to the NHS. While we only estimate the costs to GP services, we know that many of these visits will lead to a referral to another specialist."

The researchers found that the link between [mental health problems](#) in adolescence and a higher rate of GP use as an adult was generally stronger in women. For example, for those with both conduct and emotional problems and where at least one was categorized as "high severity," costs increased between 24% and 46%.

Dr. King said, "We know that [adolescent](#) girls experience greater anxiety

than boys, and if this persists it may explain women's higher use of GP services in adulthood. It may also reflect women's greater willingness to seek a GP's help for their [health issues](#)."

Dr. Sara-Evans Lacko, assistant professorial research fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and one of the authors of the research, said, "Pressure on primary care services could be eased if [conduct](#) and [emotional problems](#) could be prevented or successfully managed in adolescence. This is particularly important given that rates of adolescent mental health problems are growing and that we know they are linked with poorer health, social and economic outcomes in later life."

More information: Derek King et al, Effects of mental health status during adolescence on primary care costs in adulthood across three British cohorts, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2023). DOI: [10.1007/s00127-023-02507-y](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-023-02507-y)

Provided by London School of Economics

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