

# Kindergarten conduct problems could cost society later, researchers find

August 30 2023, by Sara P. Brennen

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

A new economic analysis has linked, for the first time, conduct problems among kindergarten students with significant costs to society in terms of crime and associated medical expenses and lost productivity when they

are adults.

"Providing effective, evidence-based programming designed to address behavioral problems early on has the potential to improve students' well-being in the long term," said project collaborator Damon Jones, associate research professor in the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center (PRC). "This study implies that there could be an additional benefit of reduced need for government services and lower costs related to crime, where conduct problems are reduced."

Researchers reviewed teacher- and parent-reported data on conduct problems among more than 1,300 kindergarten students from two multi-site, [longitudinal studies](#) conducted in U.S. schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They used government and administrative data to determine the costs associated with crimes committed by the students through age 28. The team reported their results in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

The researchers found that increased behavioral problems—such as oppositional or antisocial behavior—in kindergarten students were linked to more than \$144,000 in costs, on average, per student related to crime and associated [medical expenses](#) and lost productivity as these children reached adolescence and adulthood.

"This study is the first to establish a connection between kindergarten students' behavior and crime-related costs when the children became adults," said Yoon Hur, assistant research professor at Penn State's Evidence-to-Impact Collaborative. Hur collaborated with Natalie Goulter, lecturer at Newcastle University, on statistical analyses for the study.

Approximately 42% of the students with increased [behavioral problems](#) had costs related to crimes involving violence, substance use, public

order or property. Further, 45% had costs related to [government services](#) use, 41% had costs related to medical services use and 58% had costs related to any of these categories.

"Data from studies such as these can be used by local, state and national governments to inform budget planning that could support prevention where early risk for [conduct problems](#) can be determined," Jones said. "Many studies have demonstrated that investing in young children through effective intervention can lead to economic benefits for people and public services over time."

**More information:** Natalie Goulter et al, Kindergarten conduct problems are associated with monetized outcomes in adolescence and adulthood, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/jcpp.13837](#)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Kindergarten conduct problems could cost society later, researchers find (2023, August 30) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-08-kindergarten-problems-society.html>

|  |
|--|
| <p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p> |
|--|