

Report highlights worrying decline in adolescents' mental and physical health in England

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New research carried out by the University as part of the Health Behavior of School Age Children Survey (HBSC) for England has found

that young people are less healthy and satisfied with their lives than in previous years. The HBSC is part of an international program led by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Funded by the Department for Health and Social Care and the Department for Education at a national level for England, the HBSC was developed to evaluate health-related attitudes and behaviors of a stratified and representative sample of 5,377 [young people](#) in England aged 11, 13 and 15 years old. It offers insights into the trends and changes observable over the past eight to 10 years and beyond. Policymakers who have supported the HBSC study for the last 20 years in England rely on this data to design and support policy and interventions to tackle the emerging issues affecting young people's health such as vaping, online behavior and mental well-being.

Among its key findings, the [study](#), which was led by Dr. Sabina Hulbert and Professor Sally Kendall at the Center for Health Services Studies, has revealed that:

- The mental and [physical health](#) of those aged 11–15 years old is declining, with well-being falling especially among girls. Only 57% of young people met the survey's criteria for high mood, and in contrast 19% were deemed at risk of depression. Nearly a quarter of young people reported feeling lonely in the past 12 months and loneliness was twice as prevalent among girls than boys.
- Healthy eating habits were found to be declining, with only half of young people claiming to eat breakfast regularly and nearly a quarter never eating breakfast. Less than half of young people reported eating fruit and vegetables daily.
- While [physical activity](#) had slightly increased among boys from 2018 to 2022, it remains low with only 21% meeting the WHO target for physical activity. The percentage of girls meeting the

target remains at just 12%.

Recommendations include halting mental health deterioration, addressing pervasive inequity and its impact on young people's lives, and strengthening [public health](#) and community support assets. The report stresses the need for integrated and tailored support in schools to support young people and the importance of involving young people in the discussion around making improvements.

Dr. Hulbert said, "While our study recorded some positive health findings, the proportions reporting overall improvements were relatively low and inconsistent across the demographics."

Professor Kendall added, "These figures aren't just numbers. The mental and physical health of our young people needs to be seen in the context of their daily lives. They are a reflection of our society, our schools, our homes. We need to understand this more deeply, involve them in the conversation and take action more swiftly to ensure young people are better supported in their home and school environments, as well as more widely in their neighborhoods and communities."

England results can be looked at in comparison to those from the other participating countries by accessing the international [HBSC website](#).

More information: 2021–2022 HBSC study: hbscengland.org/

Provided by University of Kent

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