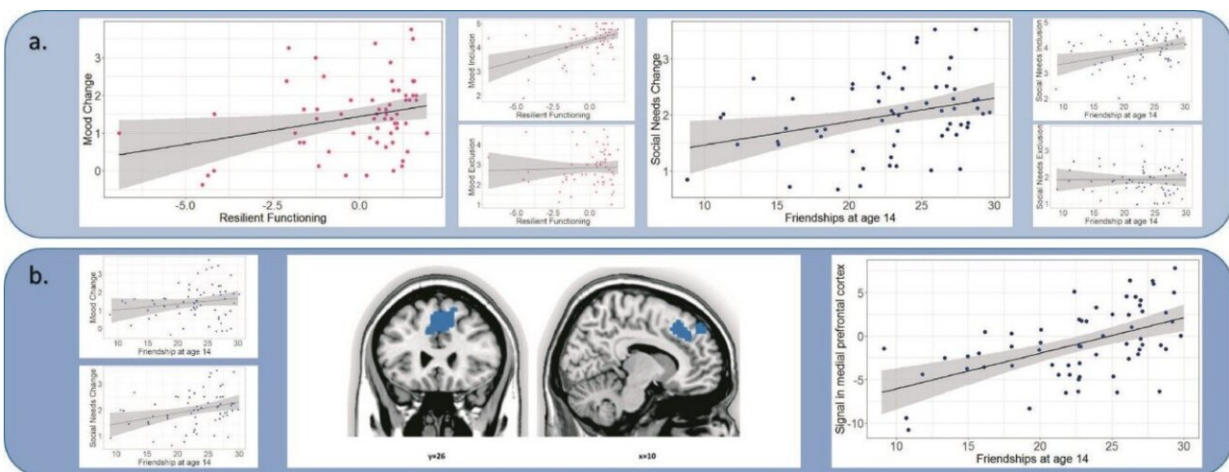


# Strong friendships in adolescence could offer a long-term measure of resilience

June 25 2024



Significant results found in the analyses of the correlations between friendship at 14, resilient functioning at age 24, brain responses to social exclusion and mood and need satisfaction scores. Credit: *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* (2024). DOI: 10.1093/scan/nsae044

Good quality friendship has a significant impact on how young people affected by childhood trauma respond to social exclusion.

In a study [published](#) in *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, researchers at the University of Birmingham showed that the quality of friendship among a cohort of 14-year-olds has a strong association with their ability to deal positively with [social exclusion](#) ten years later in

early adulthood.

While social exclusion was the stressor to test resilient functioning—a long-term marker of resilience—used in the study, the research team argue that friendship is a strong indicator of a person's overall resilient functioning, which they defined as an individual's social, emotional and behavioral functioning in relation to the trauma that they have experienced.

Dr. Maria Dauvermann, of the University's School of Psychology and Institute for Mental Health, said, "We would expect that everyone will have some problems with their mental health after any kind of stressful experience, at least in the short term. By using the definition of resilient functioning, we are taking a more sophisticated and dynamic approach that takes into account a whole range of different behavioral measures at different time points and in relation to the particular trauma severity that has been experienced.

"Mental health among [young people](#) is a complex and nuanced area. One of the things we hope to achieve through research programs like this one is to increase both awareness and understanding that will empower young people to seek support when they need it."

In this [longitudinal study](#), the researchers worked with a group of people aged 24 who had previously experienced [childhood trauma](#) and who also completed the Cambridge Friendship Questionnaire.

The questionnaire was completed by a cohort of 14-year-olds across 4 time points, with 1,238 participants completing the initial survey, and 436 remaining to complete the final survey at aged 24. Of this group, 62 people volunteered to take part in the brain imaging part of the study.

In this brain imaging part at age 24, the participants underwent a

functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging scan, during which they were asked to complete a virtual activity which simulates social exclusion by getting participants to take part in a ball-throwing team with two avatars.

The brain scan results revealed responses in a part of the brain known as the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex, an area known to be associated with generating and regulating our emotions.

The results showed clearly that better friendship quality as reported in the Cambridge Friendship Questionnaire at age 14 and better resilient functioning at age 24, , was strongly linked to a positive response to social inclusion, and therefore to better resilient functioning.

In terms of the experience of social exclusion, the results were less straightforward. Resilient functioning was not associated with altered neural responses to social exclusion.

More research is needed to explore how these friendships which are developed in adolescence aid resilient functioning in early adulthood, and also to investigate whether enhancing [peer support](#) could be an effective intervention for young people with [mental health](#) difficulties.

**More information:** Maria R Dauvermann et al, Early adolescent perceived friendship quality aids affective and neural responses to social inclusion and exclusion in young adults with and without adverse childhood experiences, *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* (2024). [DOI: 10.1093/scan/nsae044](https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsae044)

Provided by University of Birmingham

Citation: Strong friendships in adolescence could offer a long-term measure of resilience (2024,

June 25) retrieved 29 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-06-strong-friendships-adolescence-term-resilience.html>

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.