

Girls twice as likely to experience emotional problems as boys, reveals study

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Credit: University College London

Girls are more than twice as likely to experience emotional difficulties as boys, while boys are significantly more likely to experience behavioural problems, UCL research has revealed.

In the first survey of its kind of more than 30,000 [young people](#) aged 11 to 14, UCL's Evidence Based Practice Unit and Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families found 25 percent of girls said they had experienced emotional problems compared with 11 percent of boys.

These are the first findings from the survey which is part of the National Lottery funded HeadStart programme and was released yesterday at a young people's [mental health](#) conference.

Other results showed:

- Around one in five [children](#) and young people said they experienced emotional problems, and the same was true for behavioural problems.

- Young people in Year 9 are more likely to report mental [health](#) problems than young people in year 7.
- Boys are one-and-a-half times more likely to say they have experienced behavioural problems than girls (with 23 percent of boys saying they had experienced them compared with 15 percent of girls).
- Young people from Asian, Black, Mixed and 'other' ethnic groups were significantly less likely to indicate they were experiencing [emotional problems](#) than young people in the White ethnic group.
- Young people with special educational needs, those eligible for free school meals and those classified as children in need were also more likely to say they were experiencing both emotional and [behavioural problems](#).

The survey concludes that there is a strong and consistent association between deprivation and mental health problems.

HeadStart is a five-year, £56 million National Lottery funded programme set-up by Big Lottery Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

Six HeadStart partnerships are working in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people (aged 10-16) by exploring and testing ways to build their resilience from an early age.

In total 30,843 young people in years 7 (11-12) and 9 (13-14) in 114 participating Headstart Schools completed the Wellbeing Measurement Framework, an online questionnaire developed by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families and UCL with the six HeadStart partnerships and the Big Lottery Fund.

The Year 7s will repeat the survey annually until they are in Year 11 and data will be collected from young people in Year 9 every year. This is one of the largest surveys of children and young people's mental wellbeing in England.

The research was led by Dr. Jess Deighton (UCL Psychology & Language Sciences), Deputy Director of the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families and UCL's Evidence Based Practice Unit.

She said: "There is so much rich data in this survey which can help us understand and respond to the mental health needs of children and young people. What is particularly exciting about this research is that we have the opportunity to follow up with these young people for a long period of time to see how their mental health and well-being changes throughout adolescence."

"The most powerful findings from this research are that mental health problems amongst children and young people now appear to be at a worrying rate and that there is a strong and consistent association between deprivation and [mental health problems](#)."

Emma Ackerman, Head of Funding for HeadStart at the Big Lottery Fund said: "HeadStart aims to improve our understanding of how communities can work together with young people to give them the tools they need to lead fulfilling lives. The programme was developed with young people, and they continue to be at the centre of the six partnerships. Using their insight and experience, they are taking the lead in shaping support locally which benefits them and their peers."

"Existing evidence shows that by 14 a significant number of young people report depressive symptoms, and the results released today show just how important it is to take action early. Over the coming years we look forward to seeing the difference HeadStart has the potential to make."

Provided by University College London

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