

Schools have a small but important role in early adolescents' mental health

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A study in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (JAACAP)* reports in adolescents 11–14 years old, that schools account for a small, but significant part of a young person's

mental health.

"As [young people](#) transition back-to-school, we must prioritize their mental health and consider what we can do to promote their well-being. Schools are potentially well placed to do this as young people spend much of their waking life at school; however, [policy makers](#) also need to look at any number of factors outside schools that are consistently associated with poor mental health—namely deprivation and [social inequality](#)," said corresponding author Willem Kuyken, Ph.D., Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Oxford, UK.

A sample of 26,885 students, between 11 to 14 years of age, across 85 schools were surveyed to establish young people's mental health and which school and broader factors were important. Schools accounted for only 2.4 percent of the variation in social-emotional-behavioral difficulties; 1.6 percent of the variation in depressive symptoms; and 1.4 percent of the variation in well-being. Other factors like being in an urban location, greater levels of deprivation and being white British were all associated with poorer mental health. While schools explained only small amounts of variation in mental health, in support of additional research in the field, school climate was nonetheless associated with mental health.

The findings, from data obtained in the My Resilience in Adolescence (MYRIAD) study, explore what supports young people's mental health and evaluates the cost-effectiveness of a mindfulness training intervention delivered to an entire school. This study uses the data from this mindfulness trial to explore school-level influences on the mental health of young people.

"Despite the direct influence of schools on mental health being small in our study, this does not mean schools should stop themselves short of doing something really valuable to improve a young person's [mental](#)

[health](#)," said Tamsin Ford, Ph.D., Professor of Child Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, UK. "A positive school climate seems key and there are a range of whole school and targeted interventions that work. I would add that even small [school](#)-level effects may translate into more significant impacts if the substantial future health, economic, and societal costs of mental ill [health](#) are considered."

More information: Tamsin Ford et al, The Role of Schools in Early Adolescents' Mental Health: Findings From the MYRIAD Study, *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jaac.2021.02.016](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2021.02.016)

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