

Teens' mental health affects how long they stay in school, new study shows

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Queen's University researcher Steven Lehrer has won a prestigious international award in recognition of his contributions to health economics.

A professor in Queen's School of Policy Studies and Department of Economics, Dr. Lehrer shares the RAND Corporation's Victor R. Fuchs Research Award with Jason Fletcher of Yale University. Their prize-winning paper, recently published in the journal *Forum for Health Economics & Policy*, examines the effects of adolescent health on educational outcomes.

"Our study shows that poor [mental health](#) in children and teenagers has a large impact on the length of time they will stay in school," says Dr. Lehrer. He notes a large number of school-based programs have recently been introduced to prevent childhood obesity through lifestyle changes, but suggests the net should be cast more widely. "It's important for policymakers to target health conditions that are not the easiest to identify - like inattention - but may have larger impacts on one's future."

The findings provide strong evidence that inattentive symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in childhood and depression in adolescents are linked to the number of years of completed schooling. Dr. Lehrer says this points to potentially large benefits from childhood and adolescent health interventions that have not yet been identified. "We focus on the link between health and education because unraveling the mechanisms linking the two will have important

implications for policy design."

In their study, the team introduces a new research design they call a "genetic lottery" identification strategy, based on the fact that at conception there are differences in genetic inheritance among siblings. "While our paper uses this research design to estimate the relationship between health and education outcomes, we believe this identification has much wider applicability in a number of critical areas in both social science and [health](#) services research," says Dr. Lehrer.

Source: Queen's University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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