

# Boys' cynicism towards school increases at upper secondary school

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According to a recent study, the negative and cynical attitude of boys towards school increases dramatically as they advance in their upper secondary studies. Boys are very enthusiastic about their studies at the start of upper secondary school, but this initial enthusiasm is not sustained throughout the entire three to four years of studies. Their cynicism easily transforms into a negative attitude toward the entire society, thus increasing the risk of marginalisation. This information was gained through a longitudinal youth study that was partly funded by the Academy of Finland.

"Boys experience a strong crisis concerning a sense of disconnectedness. The school does not offer the boys suitable challenges and so they become bored and begin to turn away from the upper secondary school," describes Professor Katariina Salmela-Aro, who is leading the study.

Girls, on the other hand, experience a feeling of inadequacy in upper secondary school, which may lead to depression later in life. "The pivotal factor causing stress in the lives of youth is school. All stress is not, however, detrimental for youth; rather, it teaches them that challenges are a part of life. Effective stress management and preparedness towards setbacks build up essential experiences of success for young people."

Problems arise when the stress experienced by boys turns into cynicism and, in girls, a sense of inadequacy. Highly functioning social networks and a supportive developmental environment further advance positive

growth in children and adolescents and reduce the risk of vulnerability.

According to Salmela-Aro, school-related exhaustion manifests differently in boys and girls, and it may also be caused by the particular educational track selected by a [young person](#). [Boys](#) and girls react differently to the challenges of upper secondary and vocational schooling. For example, over the course of studies in the vocational track, there is a clear decline in the [cynicism](#) and sense of inadequacy experienced in girls.

"For youth, school can serve as the key turning point, when their development may turn toward either a positive or negative trend. The most crucial task of the school is to instil the joy of learning for its students. [School](#) should be viewed not only as an institution that offers an education but also as an important developmental environment that has a far-reaching impact on one's later life," adds Katariina Salmela-Aro. She feels that there should be a greater emphasis on the school's role in reinforcing protective factors and providing, in a broader sense, resources for life management.

The data for the study was collected from the FinEdu longitudinal study, in which youth in one Finnish city were monitored annually throughout their comprehensive and secondary level schooling.

**More information:** The new research results were published in an international scientific journal: Salmela-Aro, K., & Tynkkynen, L. (2012). "Gendered pathways in school burnout among adolescents". *Journal of Adolescence*.

Provided by Academy of Finland

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