

Study shows teenagers can have a ball without excess

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Financial disadvantage does not necessarily lead to pupils' exclusion from American-style high school proms, according research carried out by the Universities of Bath, Stirling and Lancaster.

Whilst the study found adolescents from low-income families spent a lower amount than the UK average of £400 on their prom, it also

revealed their access to the prom was navigated through personal and social [coping strategies](#).

The British Academy-funded study involved conducting in-depth interviews with adolescent [males and females](#) from five [secondary schools](#) in the North of England.

Dr Pete Nuttall, from Bath's [School](#) of Management, who led the study, said: "The coping strategies displayed by the respondents suggested active problem-solving as well as the use of emotional techniques.

"Teenagers used their knowledge of the marketplace to access this increasingly significant ritual event."

He added: "Though there was some evidence of financial difficulties, both individual and collective approaches were employed to ensure these adolescents were able to mark the end of high school in glamorous fashion."

The study revealed that whilst poorer adolescents relinquished limo hire – suggesting this was not central to the event – their outfits, hairstyles, spray tans and accessories were all evident in their preparation for prom.

Professor Maria Piacentini from Lancaster University Management School commented: "these teenagers did not necessarily perceive themselves to be disadvantaged and were able to use the resources available to them to overcome financial shortfalls."

She added: "They used their experience and social networks to reduce the cost associated with prom. Items for prom were often found online at a fraction of the retail price and extended family members were able to assist with beauty treatments and products."

Interestingly, the researchers found schools had strategies in place to overcome financial concerns, with a number of schools dedicating class time and school facilities to dressmaking – enabling pupils to make their own prom dresses.

Dr Julie Tinson of Stirling Management School at the University of Stirling also noted some schools even used prom as a motivational tool. She said: "In some instances schools used prom to enhance academic performance, by providing free prom tickets to adolescents who attended exam revision classes."

Provided by University of Bath

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