

Why are UK teenagers skipping school?

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Analysis of the results of a large-scale survey reveals the extent of truancy in English secondary schools and sheds light on the mental health of the country's teens.

In their article "Truancy and well-being among secondary school pupils in England" published in a special issue of the journal Educational Studies on School Attendance and Behaviour, Gaynor Attwood and Paul Croll reflect on thousands of responses from the seven-year Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.

They discovered that 'problems of truancy and mental well-being are both features of the lives of many [young people](#)', although happily, 'neither is characteristic of the majority'.

One in five of the year-10 pupils surveyed admitted to being truant the 'odd day' or 'just for certain lessons', with boys and girls having very similar levels. High levels of truancy – days or weeks at a time – were much less common. Of those who did admit to playing truant, more than half gave a dislike of an aspect of school, teachers or lessons as the reason; just over 20% said they were bored and just over 5% said they were bullied. Interestingly, most truants acknowledged the importance of doing well at school, even though truancy is associated with the very opposite.

Attwood and Croll tease out the complex associations between truancy, socio-economic status, exam results and future employment. Truancy of all types was associated with a variety of negative outcomes. Even

truanting 'for the odd day or lesson' is associated with 'much poorer outcomes than those of the non-truants'. By way of example, the authors found that low-level truants were twice as likely to be unemployed at age 20 than non-truants, and high-level truants four times. Well over half the higher-level truants studied failed to get even one C grade.

Attwood and Croll also discovered a strong association between truancy and wellbeing, demonstrating that 'for many young people these problems are cumulative'. Serious levels of distress and inability to cope were experienced by perhaps as many as one in five of the young people under study.

The authors were particularly struck by the fact the young women were 'much more likely' to report negative feelings than their male counterparts, with the gender difference even more pronounced at the extreme end of the scale.

This article is essential reading for anyone responsible for the education or mental wellbeing of teenagers, because, as the authors conclude, 'truancy needs to be seen in the context of the many difficulties facing young people and as part of wider issues of social adjustment.'

More information: "Truancy and well-being among secondary school pupils in England." [DOI: 10.1080/03055698.2014.955725](https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2014.955725)

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