

# Emotional distress in teens linked to later employment prospects

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Suffering from emotional problems in adolescence is an important risk factor for future joblessness, irrespective of socio-economic background, according to a new report by academics at the University of Stirling.

The research, which examined the employment patterns of over 7,000 Americans over a 12 year period, found [clear evidence](#) that distressed [adolescents](#) - who tend to feel nervous or depressed rather than calm or happy - subsequently experienced [higher levels](#) of joblessness in [early adulthood](#).

Adolescents who were highly distressed at ages 16 to 20 were 32% more likely to be unemployed, and 26% more likely to be unemployed or out of the workforce in early adulthood. The trends held, even when comparing distressed to non-distressed siblings, suggesting that [emotional problems](#) carry a heavy penalty even among brothers and sisters from the same background.

The study also revealed that the adverse impact of psychological distress on job prospects grew in the years following the 2007 - 2009 Great Recession where those with a history of distress experienced a pronounced rise in joblessness.

Mark Egan of the Behavioural Science Centre at the University of Stirling said: "These findings provide strong evidence that distressed adolescents are vulnerable to unemployment and suggest that this

vulnerability increased during the recent difficult economic period following the Great Recession."

Economic benefits could be gained by treating mental health issues in early life and the researchers called for investment in this area.

"Investing in childhood and adolescent mental health services could have economic benefits including reducing population-level unemployment. Widening access to effective treatments for early life distress could lead to large economic returns by helping individuals into employment and increasing their lifetime earnings", says Egan.

The study, conducted by Mark Egan, Dr Michael Daly and Professor Liam Delaney of the University of Stirling's Behavioural Science Centre, used data from over 7,000 American adults, drawn from the National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997, born in 1980 - 1984.

The study was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, Skills Development Scotland, and the European Commission Marie Curie Initiative.

The paper is available to download from the journal *Social Science & Medicine*.

Provided by University of Stirling

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