

Report highlights loneliness and lack of social integration amongst young people

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In an increasingly globalised economy and culturally diverse country, a new report from King's College London and NCS reveals a 'concerning' lack of social integration and level of loneliness amongst the next generation of young people, which could be harmful to the UK's economy and wellbeing in the future.

Authored by Dr Jennifer Lau, a [researcher](#) specialising in the [psychology](#) of adolescent mental health at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN), King's College London, and NCS, the report explores why '[social intelligence](#)', defined as the ability to apply our understanding of people's emotions to decide the appropriate form of interaction with others, will become increasingly important to future generations. The report draws on previous studies and new research amongst employers, adults and young people that identifies how the

current generation of young people may require additional support.

It also discusses measures of social intelligence in light of an increasingly diverse, technology-reliant and connected country. Despite criticisms that social media could negatively impact on young people's social skills, the report found that increased online interaction does not damage teenagers' social intelligence levels. The findings showed a small relationship in the opposite direction: teenagers with better ability to form friendships reported more online usage thus suggesting that online usage could support the development of their social skills.

Dr Jennifer Lau, researcher from King's College London, said: 'It is surprising to see that online interaction is positively linked to a young person's social intelligence levels. This could be an indication that young people are using the internet as a platform to build relationships with others and to practice their social skills.

She added: 'However, while important as a means of practicing social skills, online interaction is not a substitute for real life interaction. Not only is online interaction associated with more loneliness in later life - as indicated by our research - this form of communication alone is not adequate in preparing young people for the challenges of the workplace.'

Instead, the research shows one of the indicators of lower [social skills](#) amongst the next generation is the inability for teenagers to interact with other [young people](#) from different backgrounds. With a lack of [social integration](#) estimated to cost the UK economy £6 million a year, new research shows more than two thirds of peer groups are still made up of those from similar backgrounds and nine in 10 adolescents are nervous about interacting with people from different backgrounds.

The study recommends social mixing should form an integral part of social intelligence development in teenagers. It argues that parents may

have an important role to play, as older generations own circles also remain relatively closed to different cultures, backgrounds and upbringing.

According to the report, another concerning consequence of low social intelligence levels amongst teenagers is increased loneliness, both in the immediate term and in later life. Despite loneliness being often associated with older people, new research shows six in ten teenagers are sometimes lonely and one in twenty never spend time with friends outside of school. The research indicates that if social intelligence skills aren't developed during adolescence they could lead to [loneliness](#) and reduced wellbeing in later life, making a clear case for social intelligence's role in building resilience against social isolation and mental health conditions in later life.

More information: Read the full report: www.ncsyes.co.uk/file/social-intelligence-report-finalpdf

Provided by King's College London

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