

Belief in academic ability key factor in academic success for low-income students

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A strong belief in their own academic ability can help children from low-income families defy the odds and achieve academic success, according to new research from Trinity College Dublin.

The study, led by Jillian Sheehan and Dr. Kristin Hadfield, School of Psychology, focused on the academic resilience of [children](#) from low-income backgrounds, particularly in mathematics. The research drew on data from 1,715 children participating in the Growing Up in Ireland [longitudinal study](#), following them across three waves of the dataset.

Poverty can put children at a significant disadvantage academically, with many lagging in [academic performance](#), facing lower chances of completing secondary or [higher education](#) and receiving worse marks in Leaving Cert exams, according to the authors.

However, this new research reveals that, despite these challenges, many children living in poverty excel in school. This study, [published](#) in the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, offers fresh insights into the factors driving their success. The paper is titled, "Overcoming socioeconomic adversity: Academic resilience in mathematics achievement among children and adolescents in Ireland."

Key findings of the research include:

- Adolescents from [low-income families](#) with lower socioemotional and behavioral difficulties and a strong intellectual self-concept (belief in their own academic abilities) had better math performance.
- Lower levels of parent-child conflict, higher parental educational expectations for the child, and greater parental education also emerged as significant predictors of better math performance.
- Attending a school that is not part of the DEIS program was associated with better math performance.

Dr. Kristin Hadfield, Assistant Professor in the School of Psychology, said, "Success in school can be a young person's main avenue to break a cycle of disadvantage. By understanding the diverse factors that shape

academic resilience, we can develop targeted interventions to empower [young people](#) from low-income backgrounds and enhance their educational outcomes."

"In particular, our findings suggest that strategies addressing young people's belief in their own abilities, as well as their emotional and behavioral issues, could be important in enhancing academic resilience."

Lead author on the study Jillian Sheehan said, "Coming from a disadvantaged area in the Northside of Cork city and having attended what is now a DEIS school, this research holds great significance for me. The harsh reality is that [academic achievement](#) within our current educational framework is influenced by factors far beyond a child's internal characteristics. Our research underscores the pivotal roles of parents, teachers, educators, researchers, and policymakers in the pursuit of educational equity in this country."

"Our research is timely, offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and families as they strive to close the achievement gap and support all students in reaching their full potential. The findings underscore the importance of a comprehensive, multisystemic approach to supporting the [academic success](#) of youth from disadvantaged backgrounds."

More information: Jillian Sheehan et al, Overcoming socioeconomic adversity: Academic resilience in mathematics achievement among children and adolescents in Ireland, *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/bjdp.12512](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjdp.12512)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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