

Evidence suggests that most adult mental health disorders start in childhood. By following people throughout their lives, longitudinal population studies are uniquely placed to help us understand what factors during a person's life might be contributing to mental health disorders and low levels of wellbeing later in life. They can also shed light on the impact this is having on other areas of their lives, and what policy interventions are required to reduce the impact on individuals and society.

Key messages

- Experiences in our early life can have long-lasting impacts felt throughout the life course. Data from CLOSER's longitudinal population studies enable researchers to track how factors including family stability, parent health and childhood environment can impact adult mental health and well-being.
- The quality of child-parent relationships and parental mental health in childhood are strongly associated with subsequent mental well-being in adulthood, even more so than childhood socioeconomic circumstances.
- Childhood bullying is linked to use of mental health services in later life – people bullied frequently or even occasionally as children used more mental health services 39 years later than those who were not bullied.
- A quarter of girls and one in 10 boys are depressed at age 14, according to research which analysed information on more than 10,000 children taking part in the Millennium Cohort Study.
- Research using data from multiple UK longitudinal population studies found that childhood disadvantage is strongly associated with poorer adult mental wellbeing for Generation X. In contrast, Baby Boomers' childhood background was not linked to their wellbeing in adulthood.
- Policy interventions should be twofold with focusing on reducing childhood poverty and supporting positive parenting and parental mental health during childhood in order to promote lifelong mental well-being. Policies that focus on improving childhood socioeconomic circumstances and parental practices would therefore reduce the need for later life interventions.



Evidence

CLOSER Learning Hub case studies:

- [Mental health and wellbeing](#)
- [Childhood environment and adult mental wellbeing](#)
- [Scarring effects of childhood bullying](#)
- [The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health](#)

COVID-19 Briefing Notes:

- [August 2021 \[PDF\]](#)
- [November 2020 \[PDF\]](#)

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