



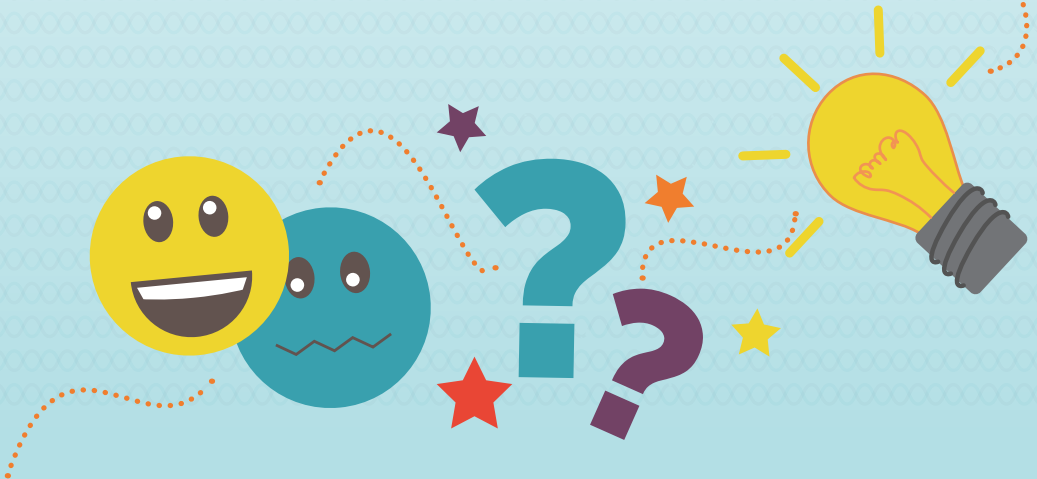
EBPU
Evidence Based
Practice Unit

A partnership of



Learning from HeadStart:

the mental health and wellbeing of boys and girls aged 11 - 14



What is HeadStart?

HeadStart is a six-year, £67.4 million programme set up by the National Lottery Community Fund, the largest funder of community activity in the UK.

HeadStart looks at how to help young people with their wellbeing and how to stop young people from developing serious mental health issues. To do this, HeadStart is providing different types of help and support to young people in schools, online and where they live.

HeadStart is happening in six areas across England: Hull, Wolverhampton, Newham, Cornwall, Blackpool and Kent. The six areas are making sure that young people are part of the whole project, because young people have lots of knowledge about what works and what they need.

The HeadStart Learning Team is a group of researchers from the Evidence Based Practice Unit (UCL and the Anna Freud Centre), the University of Manchester, and the Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC). The London School of Economics (LSE) and Common Room used to be part of the HeadStart Learning Team. The Learning Team researches the ways that HeadStart is supporting young people and looks at whether this support is helping. They produce reports and messages explaining what the research shows.

Booklet by Olivia Wild, Sarah Stock and Lauren Garland, with thanks to the Research Champions at the Anna Freud Centre for their valuable contributions.

Derived from Deighton, J., Yoon, Y. & Garland, L. (2020). *Learning from HeadStart: the mental health and wellbeing of adolescent boys and girls*. London: EBPU.

What is this booklet about?

This booklet is about our research on the mental health and wellbeing of girls and boys, aged 11 – 14.

Recent research suggests that:



1 in 8 children and young people experience mental health problems



As young people move through adolescence, mental health problems seem to get worse



Boys are more likely to have behavioural problems (like aggressive behavior) and girls are more likely to have emotional problems (like anxiety and depression). However, all types of mental health problems can be experienced by both boys and girls.

It wasn't possible in this research to identify non-binary and transgender young people. We recognise that understanding the mental health and wellbeing of transgender and non-binary young people is an important area for future research.

We wanted to find out more about changes to young people's experiences of mental health problems as they get older, and about the differences between the mental health and wellbeing of boys and girls.

We aimed to answer these questions:

1. Have mental health problems increased, decreased or stayed the same over the past few years, for young people aged 11-14?
2. What are the differences in the mental health problems and wellbeing of boys and girls aged 11-14, and when do these differences occur?
3. What happens to young people's mental health and wellbeing as they move from Year 7 to Year 9?

This booklet is based on data collected through the HeadStart Wellbeing Measurement Framework between 2017 and 2019.

About the Wellbeing Measurement Framework

The Wellbeing Measurement Framework is an online survey. Pupils in schools taking part in this research fill in the survey in Years 7, 8 and 9. The survey asks pupils about their thoughts and feelings, to help us understand how they are doing with their mental health and wellbeing. In the survey, pupils rank how true a statement is for them. Some examples of these statements are:

- I worry a lot;
- I think before I do things;
- I am usually on my own;
- I generally play alone or keep to myself.



Why are we interested in this topic?

We think it is important to know when changes to young people's mental health and wellbeing are likely to occur so that early help can be put in place, to support young people before they develop mental health problems. This could prevent problems from getting worse as the young person gets older.

This booklet talks about some difficult issues, like bullying, feeling depressed and feeling alone. If you find anything covered here upsetting, speak to an adult you can trust, like someone at home or school. You can also find a list of other support options at the end of this booklet.

About our research

About HeadStart

The HeadStart programme will run for

6
years

£67.4
million

National Lottery funded programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund.

The aim is to explore and test new ways to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 10 to 16 and prevent serious mental health issues from developing.

6

Local authority led HeadStart partnerships in Blackpool, Cornwall, Hull, Kent, Newham and Wolverhampton.

The HeadStart programme works with with local young people, schools, families, charities, community and public services to make young people's mental health and wellbeing everybody's business.

43,500+

young people in Years 7, 8 and 9 answered questionnaires between 2017 – 2019.

Who took part in this research?

The young people who filled in our online survey between 2017 and 2019 can be split into two groups:

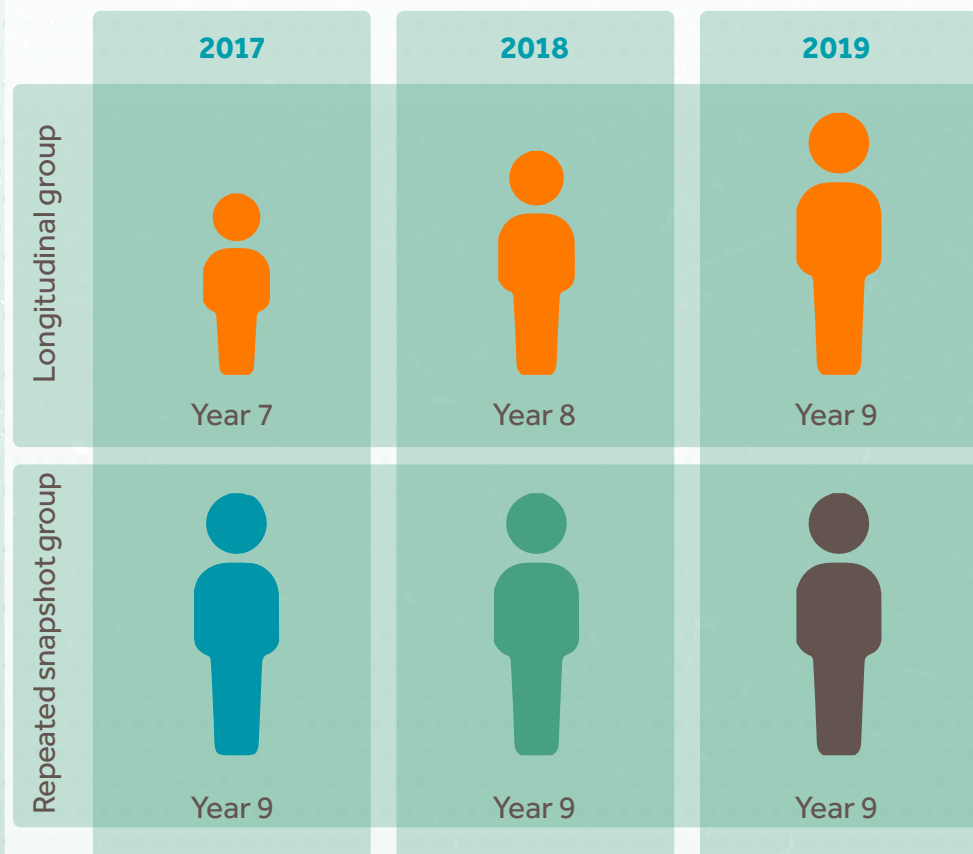
1. Longitudinal group:

- The same young people completed the survey when they were Year 7 in 2017, when they were Year 8 in 2018, and again when they were Year 9 in 2019.
- There were 10,889 young people in this group - 46% of them were boys, and 54% were girls.
- This is like a taking a photo of the same pupils each year, to see whether they change as they get older!



2. Repeated snapshot group:

- Different Year 9s completed the survey every year between 2017 and 2019.
- 43,794 young people were surveyed as part of this group, 47% were boys 53% were girls.
- This is like taking a photo of Year 9 every year – imagine comparing the photos of the Year 9 pupils from 2017, 2018 and 2019!



What did we look at?

We explored five areas of young people's mental health problems and wellbeing:

Emotional difficulties,
like anxiety or depression.



I am often
unhappy,
down-hearted
or tearful

Behavioural difficulties,
like aggressive behavior and
'acting out'.

I get very angry
and often lose
my temper



Hyperactivity/inattention,
like difficulties with staying still
and concentrating.



I am restless, I
cannot stay still
for long

Peer problems,
like feeling alone and being bullied.

I am usually
on my own. I
generally play
alone or keep to
myself



Subjective wellbeing

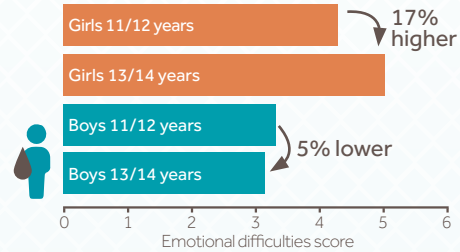
This means feeling generally good
about life, feeling able to deal with
problems well and feeling positive
about the future.



What did we find?

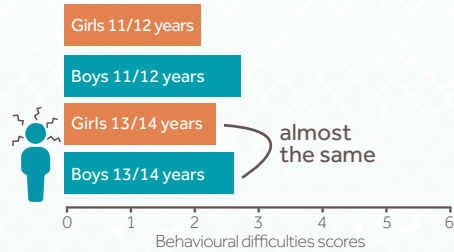
Findings from the 'longitudinal group'

Emotional difficulties



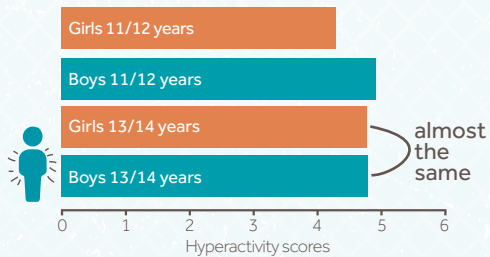
At 11/12 years old, on average, girls' emotional difficulties were higher than boys and they continued to increase (by 17%) over time, whereas boys' emotional difficulties decreased a little bit (by 5%) over time.

Behavioural difficulties



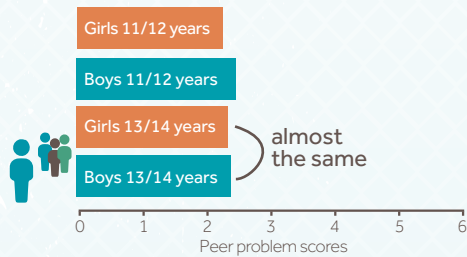
At 11/12 years old, on average, behavioural difficulties were higher in boys. However, by age 13/14 behavioural difficulties among girls had increased to almost the same as boys, as boys decreased by 4% and girls increased by 11%.

Hyperactivity



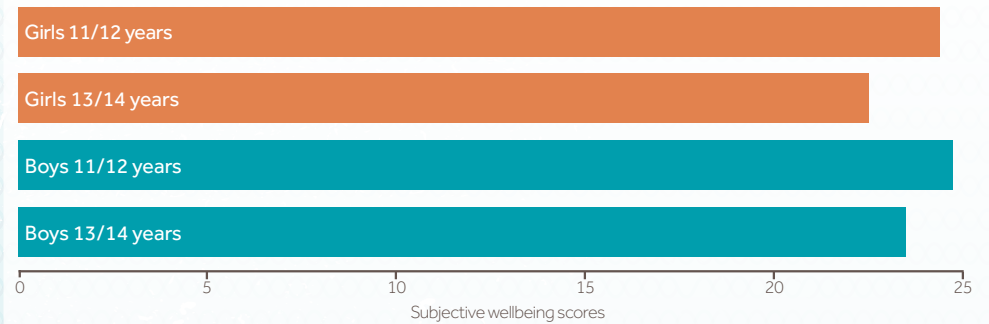
On average, girls aged 11/12 years old had fewer problems with hyperactivity than boys. By the age of 13/14, hyperactivity had decreased slightly among boys and increased among girls (by 11%), so they became similar.

Peer problems



On average, peer problems were higher for boys at age 11/12, but decreased slightly by the time they reached age 13/14. Peer problems among girls increased slightly as they got older, leading to similar scores for boys and girls by Year 9.

Subjective wellbeing



Boys' average subjective wellbeing (feeling generally good about life, feeling able to deal with problems well and feeling positive about the future) did not change much over time, but girls' wellbeing got worse.



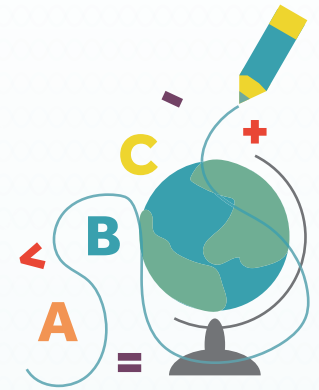
What do these findings tell us?

- This study shows evidence that overall, as young people get older (age 11/12 to 13/14), they experience more difficulties with their mental health and wellbeing. This is mostly because of girls having more difficulties as they get older, rather than boys.
- Differences between boys' and girls' mental health and wellbeing begin at age 11/12, if not before.
- It is important that we make sure support is available for girls aged 11/12 or even younger, to prevent problems from getting worse as they become teenagers and adults.
- However, it's also important that we pay attention to the challenges boys might face with their mental health and wellbeing. There is research that suggests that boys might find it more difficult to talk about their mental health, which could be a reason why boys had fewer mental health problems in our research.
- We should focus on the period when young people move up from primary to secondary school, as proper support at this time could prevent mental health problems from developing and getting worse.
- Schools are in a good position to offer wellbeing support for all pupils at this time and to identify certain students who need extra help with their mental health.



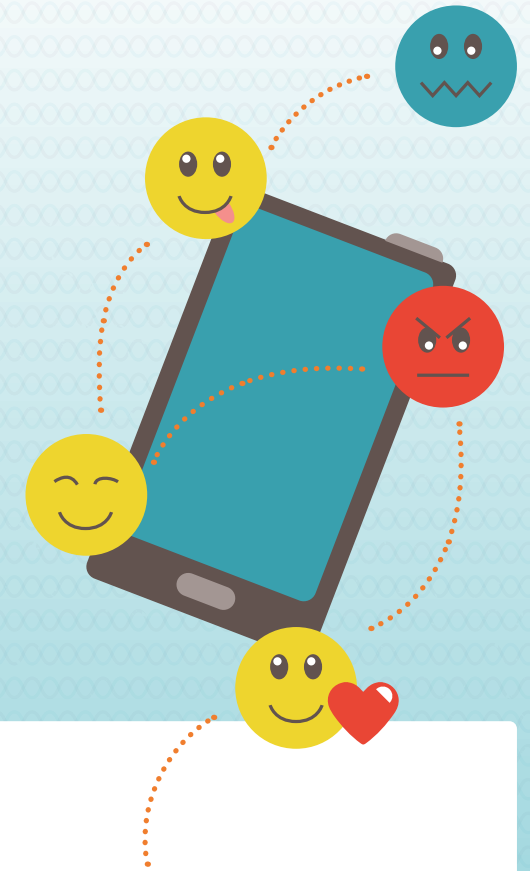
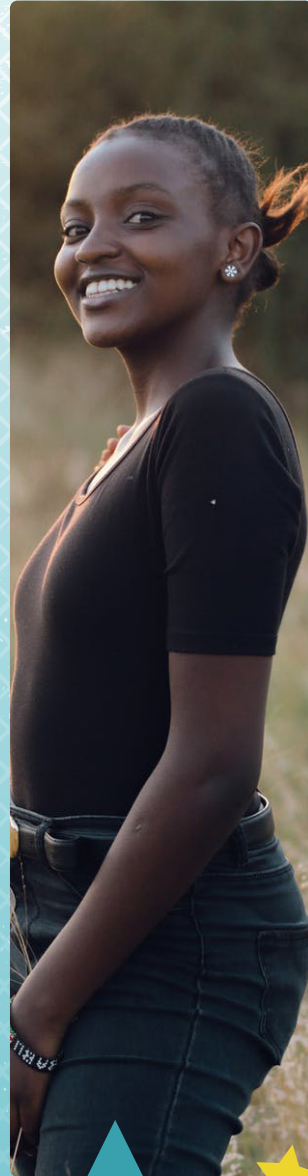
Findings from the 'repeated snapshot group'

- There were no big differences in the levels of mental health difficulties and wellbeing between Year 9s in 2017, Year 9s in 2018 and Year 9s in 2019.
- Overall, girls' emotional difficulties were higher than boys' emotional difficulties.
- Overall, boys' behavioural difficulties were higher than girls' behavioural difficulties.
- Boys reported higher levels of subjective wellbeing (feeling generally good about life, feeling able to deal with problems well and feeling positive about the future) than girls.



What do these findings tell us?

- There isn't any evidence from our research to suggest that more young people aged 13-14 have mental health problems now than in 2017.
- This suggests that mental health problems for young people are not increasing year-on-year.
- Other research, conducted over longer periods of time, has suggested that mental health problems among young people around this age are increasing. Our research took place over three years and it could be that this is not long enough to see a change.
- It is important to note that each kind of mental health problem we investigated as part of our research was experienced by both boys and girls. Although emotional difficulties were more common in girls, boys also experienced emotional difficulties. Similarly, although boys reported more behavioural difficulties, girls also reported behavioural difficulties.
- We should also recognise that some young people might not have felt comfortable answering the survey honestly, for example if they completed it in a classroom with other pupils around them. In addition, if a pupil was asked to identify their gender as part of the survey, they might feel that they should answer a certain way because of ingrained gender stereotypes.



Where can I find support?

Childline: 0800 1111

The Samaritans: 116 123

On My Mind: www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind

The Mix: www.themix.org.uk

Shout: Text 85258



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Evidence Based Practice Unit (EBPU)

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EBPU is a partnership of UCL and the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families. Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families is a company limited by guarantee, company number 03819888, and a registered charity, number 1077106.



The Child Outcomes Research Consortium (CORC) is the UK's leading membership organisation that collects and uses evidence to enable more effective child-centred support, services and systems to improve children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. We have over 15 years' experience in bringing together theoretical knowledge on outcome measurement and relating this to the insights and expertise developed by practitioners working with children and young people on the ground.

<https://www.corc.uk.net/>