

How do the experiences of young people at school affect how healthy a lifestyle they adopt?

Sociologists do not explain healthy as being physically healthy, but rather being able to make key decisions and assess risks properly without any barriers to their mind or thinking process. The essay will also use sociological and psychological findings and statistics to strengthen the argument it proposes. Throughout their school lives, children will likely experience every single emotion that a human is able to feel, whether it be positive or negative, life changing or life threatening, and they will typically sit in silence while they experience all of these emotions and moods for the first time in their lives. Modern day schooling is not about learning and retaining information that will help you later in life, but rather about passing the test or achieving the grade.

To inform the research, two high-attaining students were interviewed about their experiences of secondary school, a 13 year old female of a multi-racial background and a 14 year old Caucasian boy. They both attend a secondary comprehensive state school. In their interviews, both young people described having experienced moments in which they felt helpless throughout their school life; those times will likely impact them greatly on several occasions throughout the rest of their lives. As high attaining students who also suffer from mental and emotional health issues, it could be argued that the school life they experience could be a contributing factor to the stress they feel. Their natural ability could result in them being considered highly intelligent and they are having to deal with both the social aspects of school and the intellectual strain of the content they have to cover. If these issues were isolated and only one remained, perhaps their school lives may improve, but in the current state of the schooling system, this will likely not be something they ever get to experience. The lifestyle that students adopt are directly tied to the mental issues that they face, and educational intuitions are ignoring these issues, meaning that the young people of today will likely not experience their ideal life.

Due to schools focusing more on the grades students achieve young people may feel trapped and unable to control both themselves and their lives. This leads to far more stress, as students are currently investing more time into homework than previous generations. This is a contributing factor to the development of certain mental disorders, such as stress or depression. This is a clear indication that changes need to be made to the way schools educate their students and support those who need it. One study conducted by *childtrends* (2018) showed that twenty percent of students suffer from depression and only thirty percent of those people will receive the necessary support. Another study shows that eighteen percent of young people will contemplate suicide, and nine percent will attempt it. This figure went down between 1991 and 2009 before rapidly increasing again to the figures we see today. Both of the case studies have had experiences with depression and

counselling, however neither felt comfortable being open when talking about the way they feel. Young people are becoming increasingly reluctant to talk about their emotions, and this is a clear indication of a misconception about mental health. If schools were to reduce the pressure of homework and school work, perhaps the happiness of students would improve. Despite a grade only being a number, it seems to weigh more than is comprehensible when placed on the feeble shoulders of a young person. Schools do not have mandatory check-ups on mental health and they have no preventative measures, such as meditation sessions or lessons on how to deal with stress and strong emotions.

Such support is crucial at this stage in the development of a young person; teenagers face immense emotional changes as they progress through puberty. It is also at this stage of development that young people develop their feelings of attraction towards others, and for some it can be a difficult experience. With eight percent of people not identifying as heterosexual, some students will find themselves discovering their sexuality, and without the proper support, some may find the sudden change of self-understanding daunting. Schools which do not offer such support may need to consider implementing strategies toward emotional aid to meet the students' demands. This can be approached in a variety of ways which do not need to cost any money, such as: presentations in assemblies, LGBTQ+ awareness weeks or campaigns and support groups. This may lead to more long-term self-acceptance as well as an increased tolerance for others.

Equally, high expectations of an ideal body have led to nine out of ten young girls uncomfortable with their body shape.¹ Furthermore, of those girls who are uncomfortable with their body, only nineteen percent were actually classed as overweight, while sixty-seven percent believed they needed to lose weight and over sixty percent had already been on a diet. Whilst schools do not put these social pressures in place, they are aware of them and do nothing to help boost the confidence of these young people. Healthy eating is supported by many schools, which clearly helps to keep the amount of overweight students lower, thus reducing risk of health problems. However, such campaigns do not help those who are not overweight and still unhappy. A lack of self-confidence is a mental issue, not a physical one, and therefore schools need to change mind-sets, not bodies. Schools may need to have their pastoral leaders and emotional support teams look in to ways to boost self-confidence. It could be argued that although a student has not come forward and openly acknowledged that they suffer from self-esteem issues, such issues may still be present. Thoughts of self-doubts can be easily overcome by raising awareness that such feelings or similar emotions are natural. In this way, students may become more self-confident and able to deal with the pressures they may face after school.

¹ Daily Mail,
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-205285/90-teens-unhappy-body-shape.html>

Due to learning being closely tied to one's mental and emotional state, support regarding the self-confidence may lead to better learning habits and academic progress for the student. It is evident that students under a lot of stress will not only develop certain physical issues, but also issues regarding their ability to absorb and retain all the new information they learn on a daily basis. The issue is not simply about new information, but it is also about being able to recall old information, which is exactly what major tests and assessments such as GCSEs and A-levels aim to test students on. GCSE examinations which rely on a student's ability to recall crucial quotations or complex formulas fail to distinguish intelligence from a good memory. With the stress levels of young people rising, they are running in to more and more issues when sitting an exam or a test.² This is yet another issue that emotional-support teams could address by raising awareness that support is available. In this sense, pastoral staff could represent some of the most important members of staff in the education sector. Without these people to support them, students may fail their exams; be subjected to several mental and physical issues; develop poor coping habits and perhaps even have to drop out of school completely. Schools have a duty to provide students with the skills necessary to succeed beyond examinations. A lack of support should not be a reason for people to be held back in their lives. All members of staff who work at such institutions should be advised to undergo an emotional-awareness and support course so that students who trust their day-to-day teachers are not forced to talk about personal issues with people they are not comfortable talking to.

Perhaps staff should also be supported so that they can offer their utmost attention and support to the students they dedicate their lives to. Teachers are overworked and underpaid which may be a contributing factor to the lack of support offered to young people.³ A study has shown that ninety-four percent of teachers are giving up the money that they work hard to earn for equipment which should be supplied by the schools they work for. It is evident from these figures that funding and resources are currently unable to meet the demands of an average school. Whilst this may not directly affect the mental or physical health of students, the implications of limited resources can drastically influence a student's experience of school. Schools could alleviate the pressure that teachers face by providing more financial support. It is becoming increasingly common for teachers to go on strike and demand that their needs are met, and such acts of demurral may increase if this does not happen.

² SimpleRecovery,
<https://www.simplerecovery.com/why-teens-are-dealing-with-anxiety-and-stress-more-than-ever/>

³ CNN,
<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/15/politics/teachers-school-supplies-spending/index.html>

Several studies suggest that bullying rates can vary from nine percent all the way up to ninety-eight percent, which suggests that not all problems are caused by a lack of support, but also by a lack of knowledge of right or wrong. Bullying can emerge as a result of similar previous experiences, social conformity, pent up anger, or a range of other factors. No matter what the cause, the fact that such behaviour still occurs remains, and the result of this is devastating. As mentioned before, suicide rates are increasing at an alarming rate, and bullying is likely a key contributing factor to this rising figure.⁴ Bullying does not just lower self-esteem, but also increases stress and can be very hard to escape from. Bullying can also cause students to associate school with negative events, which causes strong feelings of anxiety, thus impacting their learning. School should be a place that students feel secure and safe in, not a place which cause stress and fear. Such feelings of dread can cause a young person to feel insecure and cause a lack of motivation to even get out of bed each day. A child's life is typically thought to be fun and care-free, but in the current condition of the schooling system, such thoughts are not true. Children may develop long-term self-confidence issues as a result of bullying which may carry on into their later lives.

Students are moving schools to escape such feelings, and those who caused them to feel this way are being allowed to carry on their lives in the places they force their victims out of. Some may argue that bullying is self-inflicted, as without a reason to bully someone, the whole issue would not be there in the first place. This is simply not true, as bullying actually occurs more when young people have certain aspects of themselves that are not within their control, such as physical or mental disabilities, sexuality and even their parents. In the case of Noah Baker, bullying emerged as a result of a genetic disease known as fibro xanthoma, which causes physically visible issues with his legs. During his experience in mainstream education, his mother referred to him as a "recluse", which has resulted in him resorting to being home-schooled.⁵ If the tolerance of students were to increase, and acceptance was a more common thing, then perhaps this form of behaviour would not occur as much in young people, and bullying as a whole would drastically decrease. Unfortunately for some, such as Joey McGlone, bullying can result in the suicide of a young person.⁶ In this instance, bullying was a physical interaction, and had this victim felt more supported, perhaps he would not have taken such drastic actions. This highlights the importance of providing support in schools.

⁴ ChildTrends, <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/suicidal-teens>

⁵CBS42, <https://www.cbs42.com/news/local/jasper-family-shares-their-bullying-story-in-honor-of-anti-bullying-month/1501404552>

⁶ Pensacola News Journal, <https://eu.pnj.com/story/news/crime/2018/09/19/fight-one-week-before-milton-teens-suicide-under-investigation/1349529002/>

Bullying is not only an interaction between students at school, but it has also spread into the cyberspace, meaning that even home is not a safe place for students to escape to anymore. Simple means of communicating with friends can soon become a way for someone, even if they are on the opposite side of the world, to weave their way into your life and lower your self-esteem. Ninety-five percent of young people own and use mobile phones, and forty-five percent use social media on a regular basis.⁷ This opens up a whole new way for bullies to interact with their victims and intrude on their social lives. As social media and mobile phones are key parts of many peoples' lives, cutting them out completely is not only impractical, it is also unjust; for many, social media is a form of escapism or relaxation. In these spaces, it is not rare to see someone criticising a peer because of their skill at videogames or how they look in a publicly posted picture. Videogames themselves are ways of escapism, but even they are being used to find another way to hurt someone. Whilst it may not seem like it, several students have said that videogames are becoming integral parts of their social life and lacking skill at these games actually greatly impacts the life they live in the real world. E-sports (Professional gaming) is becoming increasingly popular, and just as people who are not particularly talented at an athletic sport feel insecure about their level of skill at such activities, many people are beginning to feel the same way about E-sports and videogames. This criticism can then spread from an online environment to school, escalating the issue of bullying.

Overall, student life is becoming increasingly stressful and several mental disorders are beginning to emerge as a result of this. Young people are dieting in unhealthy ways and developing severe mental conditions which can and will ruin their later lives. Children will experience a range of pressures such as bullying, body image, low self-esteem and peer pressure, all of which could be easily reduced by implementing strategies within schools that will educate, guide and support them. In this way, both their mental and physical wellbeing would be greatly improved, thus leading to a more successful and healthy lifestyle in the future. If these issues are removed at a young age, students may be more able to face the pressures which come with examination and post-school life.

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⁷ PewInternet,

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