**Adolescence, mental health and the developing mind**

The aim of this programme is to support and fund research that examines how mental health problems emerge in young people, what makes some more susceptible or resilient than others, and how we can intervene early to promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

Budget:

£35 million

Duration:

2019 to 2026

Partners involved:

Medical Research Council (MRC), Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)

Adolescence is a time of rapid growth, learning and brain development, when our interactions with the world are changing hugely in the transition to adulthood.

The adolescence, mental health and developing mind programme will support research that examines how mental health problems emerge, what makes some people more susceptible or resilient than others and how we can intervene early to promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

Working with policymakers and people affected by these issues, including young people, parents and teachers, will be an important part of this programme, and a critical component to bringing about real-world changes from this research.

This £35 million programme is being funded by the government’s [Strategic Priorities Fund](https://www.ukri.org/our-work/our-main-funds/strategic-priorities-fund/) and delivered by the Medical Research Council (MRC) with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

**Scoping and priorities**

We will support a wide range of research through this programme, including understanding the factors that might influence mental health as well as exploring preventative strategies and novel intervention approaches. Some research challenges to be addressed may include:

* understanding the different factors that impact individuals during adolescence and how they interact, including genes, environment and social interactions
* learning what mitigates risk and enables resilience
* learning how to identify vulnerable young people early
* exploring new methods, resources and ways of working
* increasing the evidence base around what works well in schools for mental health support
* developing a better understanding of online harms and how digital technology can be harnessed to promote positive mental wellbeing.

The programme will run until 2026 and is being delivered through four interlinked areas of activity.

**Flagship research programmes**

Multidisciplinary teams will address major research challenges, helping to identify what more effective prevention and intervention approaches for young people’s mental health might look like.

**Methodological development**

This workstream will generate and embed new research methods, tools, measures and resources in the field.

**Community building**

This workstream will establish a UK-wide network of researchers and stakeholders, oriented to the challenge in question, creating and strengthening multidisciplinary research collaborations, and facilitating interactions with policymakers, health, social care and education sectors. Critically, the voice of young people will be central to these developments.

**Stakeholder engagement and knowledge mobilisation**

This workstream will accelerate the implementation of research evidence into policy and practice by linking researchers, stakeholders and relevant organisations that share knowledge.

**Partnership working**

Several other government departments, including devolved governments, have supported the development of this programme and remain engaged in its delivery.

**Young person’s advisory group**

An advisory group has been established to ensure that the direct experience of young people living with mental health issues is at the centre of the programme. The group provides guidance and advice as part of the programme’s governance structure, helps shape the involvement of young people on our funding panels and assessment processes, and co-facilitates training as part of this.

**Involvement of young people**

Beyond the young person’s advisory group, a wide group of young people are involved in the programme. This includes young people helping us to review proposals, sit on funding panels, participate in interviews and contribute to scoping workshops.

**Why adolescence?**

Adolescence is a critical, poorly understood period in the life course.

It is a crucial time when it comes to mental health. [Three quarters of mental health problems emerge before the age of 24](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15939837/). The NHS Digital Survey 2020 indicated that one in six young people (16.6%) aged 11 to 16 years had a probable mental disorder. This figure increased to one in five (20.0%) among young adults aged 17 to 22, with a great prevalence in young women.

Understanding what puts young people at risk, or enables resilience, during and before adolescence is needed to understand how some young people thrive despite exposure to adversity.

Effective early intervention for those in need will promote positive mental wellbeing and better management of mental health problems.

**A multidisciplinary approach**

A multidisciplinary approach, encompassing medicine, biology, social science, arts and humanities among others, is critical to address the complex research challenges in this space and bring about better interventions to promote good mental health.

Breaking down silos and facilitating the sharing of expertise and resources across disciplines will be an important component of the programme.

**Recruiting a programme director**

The adolescent mental health and the developing mind initiative will be looking to recruit a programme director in spring 2023.

The individual will be required to lead the programme from August 2023 to September 2026, building on it’s successful implementation to date, maximising the delivery of research excellence and real-world impact.

The role will have a particular focus on community building and stakeholder engagement aspects to drive research evidence into policy and practice.

Further details of the recruitment process to be announced in due course.