

Kids' mental health leads to work issues

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CHILDREN with poor mental health are two-thirds more likely to have a reduced ability to work as adults, according to a new study.



The British think tank Institute For Public Policy Research (IPPR) said investing in children's mental health is "crucial to reducing long-term barriers to work."

One in five children in the Britain are currently having a probable mental health issue, while government figures suggest the number of workers aged 16 to 34 who say mental ill health limits the work they can do has increased more than fourfold over the past decade.

Poor mental health is now the leading work-limiting health condition among people aged 44 and younger.

For its research, the IPPR calculated that children with severe mental or behavioural issues are much more likely to be depressed adults and suffer a physical or mental condition which impacts their chances of working.

The think tank drew on a new analysis of the 1970 British Cohort Study, which is following the lives of around 17,000 people born in England, Scotland and Wales in a single week of 1970.

The latest findings show that mental health problems at age 10 have significant implications 40 years on.

Children with severe mental and behavioural problems are 85% more likely to have symptoms of depression at age 51 and 68% more likely to have a long-term condition that impacts their ability to work, the report showed.

A long-term condition is defined as any physical or mental condition that people are expecting to last 12 months or more.

Mental to physical

The correlation also extended to poor physical health, with children with a physical health problem being 38% more likely to have limited capacity for work later in life.

Furthermore, for every four children developing a long-term health condition, one of their mothers is likely to leave the workforce altogether, the IPPR said.

With rising rates of poor mental health impacting the NHS, council services and social security system, action is needed now, the think tank added.

"Improving children's health is not just morally right – it is a social and economic necessity," the study said.

“A healthier generation of children is essential to delivering this government’s core missions: improving the nation’s health, spreading opportunity and securing sustainable economic growth...”

“Poor childhood health casts a ‘long shadow’. Children who grow up in poor health are likely to experience worse health outcomes in adulthood, achieve less at school, earn less and rely more heavily on public services throughout their lives.”

The team called for targeted investment on “high-impact, cost-saving interventions that can deliver early wins,” such as mental health support for 14 to 19-year-olds soon to enter the labour market.

Spending on children’s mental health needs to be ringfenced, it suggested, while preventative spending should be “hardwired” in health care and other public services.

Dr Jamie O’halloran, senior research fellow at IPPR, said: “The earlier we address both physical and mental health challenges children, the more likely we can prevent costly health conditions and worklessness later in life.”