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Mental problems among young 'twice 1930s level'

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The mental wellbeing of children and young people is in decline, with emotional problems and conduct disorders twice as common as they were in the 1930s, according to research.

Studies carried out by NCH, the children's charity, found that one in ten children now has a mental health disorder to a "clinically significant" level. The charity defines an "emotionally well" child as one who demonstrates empathy, self-awareness, an ability to manage their feelings, motivation and good social skills.

The report also showed that the British public believe that the healthy development of these skills plays a greater role than family income, physical health and IQ in determining the child's future social standing. Clare Tickell, chief executive of NCH, said: "The lack of emotional wellbeing among our children and young people is undermining the foundations of any social policy to combat social exclusion, deprivation or lack of social mobility.

"The emphasis must change from social class to social skills, self-esteem and resilience if we are to give the next generation the chance they deserve."

The final findings of the studies will be published in the autumn, when the charity will begin its new campaign, Growing Strong.

However, Beverley Hughes, the Minister for Children, said that figures issued by the Office for National Statistics in 2005 did not support the charity's claims that incidences of childhood depression were rising. She said: "In fact, they show that the prevalence of mental disorders among 5 to 16-year-olds in 2004 has remained broadly unchanged from the previous survey in 1999."

Research shows children's emotions key to life chances

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Emotional wellbeing in childhood was more than four times as important in improving life chances and determining later social mobility for those now in their 30s as those in their 40s (1), according to the

early findings of research released today (Wednesday 20 June) by leading children's charity, NCH.

The charity can also reveal today that the British public believe emotional wellbeing is twice as important as social class in their own social mobility (59 per cent compared to 27 per cent of respondents cited it as important). Emotional wellbeing is seen as more important than family income (49 per cent), physical health (56 per cent) and IQ (58 per cent). (2)

Emotional wellbeing can also predict good mental health in later life. A recent study shows a 100 per cent increase in the prevalence of emotional problems and conduct disorders among young people since the early 1990s (3) and around one in 10 children have a mental health disorder to clinically significant levels (4). These findings suggest declining emotional wellbeing amongst today's children and young people.

The final research will be published in the autumn when the charity will launch a major campaign, Growing Strong, aimed at further investigating the impact, raising awareness, changing policy and improving services around the emotional wellbeing of the UK's children and young people.

Clare Tickell, Chief Executive of NCH, said: "The lack of emotional wellbeing amongst our children and young people is undermining the foundations of any social policy to combat social exclusion, deprivation or lack of social mobility. We urge Gordon Brown and his new cabinet to commit to tackling this hidden and fast growing problem. The emphasis must change from social class to social skills, self esteem and resilience if we are to give the next generation the chance they deserve.

"This is why we will be investigating this issue further and launching a major campaign to increase emotional wellbeing for the next generation."

An emotionally well child or young person demonstrates empathy, self awareness, an ability to manage their feelings, motivation and good social skills. A child or young person who has good emotional wellbeing is one who works well, plays well, loves well and expects well.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

1. Research and report by Julia Margo and Sonia Sodha, Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) based on 1958 and 1970 cohorts. Sociality mobility is defined as 'the way individuals or groups move upwards or downwards from one status or class position to another within the social hierarch'. In this study the core measure of social mobility is focused on labour market measures, and in particular income as a proxy for both economic and social status
2. YouGov online survey of 2049 respondents between June 8 and 11 2007 in Britain. Results were weighted to be representative of the known population profiles from the 2001 Census.
3. Ann Hagell, A (Nuffield Foundation 2004), Are adolescent mental health problems on the rise in the UK?
4. Green, H et al (ONS, 2005), Mental Health of children and young people in Great Britain, 2004
5. NCH is one of the UK's leading children's charities, working in partnership to run nearly 500 services for more than 160,000 of the UK's most vulnerable children, young people and their families
6. NCH was previously known as National Children's Home. It rebranded in 2000 to become NCH, the children's charity.
7. For further information visit www.nch.org.uk