

Developmental Assets: The Protectors of Mental Health

Reference Article

The Importance of Developmental Assets to Mental Health in Norwegian Youth

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Glossary

Poor Mental Health

Measured as prolonged sadness (sadness all/some of the time for no reason the last month) and suicide attempt(s).

Developmental Assets

Building blocks of positive development. Benson (1990) divided the assets into two groups: internal and external assets. Within each group there are four subcategories who together constitute developmental assets in five contexts: Personal, Social, Family, School and Community.

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How can we protect our youth in a world where suicide is the third leading cause of death in adolescents? By studying developmental resources and their effect on mental health, the authors seem to have found an answer on how to protect our youth. There is a correlation between poor mental health and experiencing less developmental assets. *Youth who reported signs of prolonged sadness and suicide attempts also reported less developmental resources* than their peers who did not report such problems. Poor mental health is especially connected to asset categories such as *positive identity* and *personal assets* as well as *empowerment* and *family assets*. Therefore, we can protect our youth by making sure that they are provided with the necessary assets. There is an additive effect of the assets where youth who report more assets in general are not only doing well on positive outcomes but are also protected against risk behaviors and mental health problems. The findings are consistent with the PYD perspective and other research on the area.

The result of the study is based on data collected from *591 Norwegian high school students aged 15-19*. The students attended a public high school, and *55% of the participants were girls*. Developmental assets were measured by letting the students indicate the extent to which they had experienced any of the four internal and the four external assets developed by Peter Benson and the Search Institute in Minneapolis. In addition, two indicators were used to measure poor mental health: prolonged sadness and suicide attempt one or more times.

As the statistics show an increasing prevalence of poor mental health in Norway - especially among adolescent girls - it is now more important than ever to figure out how to protect our youth. By ensuring that youth have access to the necessary developmental resources and opportunities, we can help them handle the never-ending spiral of bad thoughts. Youth who thrives are more likely to contribute to their own development and the community they participate in. According to Benson and the **Positive Youth Development (PYD)** perspective, developmental assets are the building blocks that ensure positive youth development. The developmental resources can be divided into two main categories consisting of twenty assets each: internal assets and external assets. The assets can be divided into eight subcategories that constitute developmental assets in five contexts: Personal, Social, Family, School, and Community. Within PYD, the probability of experiencing poor mental health can be reduced if young people are provided with the opportunity to grow, learn, and lead in different contexts. It is this protective effect of assets the authors found.

Even though more research is required, the results of this study are still significant. For instance, it shows how we *can use PYD and the assets model to create supportive environments for the youth*. Here, the assets model can be used as a guideline for schools or other arenas to make a safe space for youth to develop. Norway is considered a country with a well-developed youth program, but it can do better by helping youth deal with their mental health using the necessary assets.