



BEYOND EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Identifying hidden vulnerability in young adulthood using a holistic approach to young adult development

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Introduction

The transition to adulthood brings challenges across multiple life domains.¹

Successful transitions are often defined by education and employment related outcomes,² overlooking other areas such as health, relationships and behaviours.

Thus, it is important to capture adult development holistically using a multi-dimensional framework (see Methods).

Research question: How do young people group according to the 'Framework of Successful Young Adult Development'?¹

Data

Eighth data collection wave of the Millennium Cohort Study³ collected at age 23 in 2024.

These young people have been followed from 9 months of age.

Sample size: 8740
Mean age: 23 years, 2 months old

Female 54%
White 83%

Methods

Note: The percentages indicate attainment levels in the overall sample

Eight indicators representing the dimensions of the 'Framework of Successful Young Adult Development' were analysed to identify groups with similar patterns of outcomes.

PH Physical Health
Good, Very good or Excellent self-rated general health (89.1%)

EW Emotional Wellbeing
Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale score not indicative of possible mild depression^{4,5} (75.2%)

PR Positive Relationships
UCLA-3 Loneliness Scale score not indicative of loneliness^{6,7} (64.1%)

LS Life Skills*
Manages to pay bills, save money for unexpected expenses and not have regular money worries (46.4%)
*money questions only due to data limitations

EB Ethical Behaviour
Has not carried a weapon or had contact with police (77.1%)

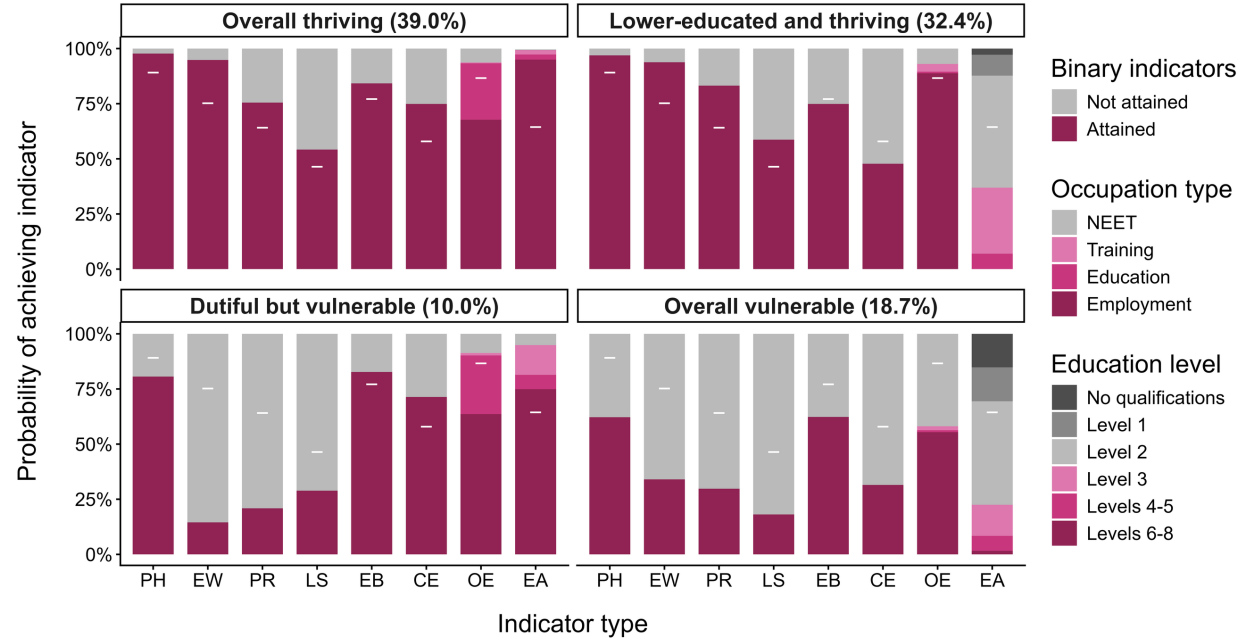
CE Civic Engagement
Intended to vote/has voted in the 2024 UK general election (57.9%)

OE Occupational Engagement
Main activity grouped as:
• Employment (71.8%)
• Education (13.0%)
• Training (1.7%)
• NEET* (13.4%)
*Not in employment, education or training

EA Educational Attainment
RQF levels including currently studied, grouped as:
• No qualifications (4.0%)
• Level 1, low GCSE* (6.0%)
• Level 2, high GCSE* (25.7%)
• Level 3, A-level* (14.4%)
• Levels 4-5, sub-degree (5.1%)
• Levels 6-8, degree+ (44.9%)
*or equivalent

PATTERNS OF ADULTHOOD ADJUSTMENT

Probability of achievement of eight successful adulthood indicators by group



Note: White dashes mark the overall sample achievement rate. Educational Attainment was split by up to level 3 and level 4 and above (post-16 education vs. no post-16 education) and Occupational Engagement was split by NEET vs. Non-NEET for the purposes of this graph.

Results

Four distinct groups emerged, two of which are of high-concern and represent over quarter of the sample.

Overall vulnerable group struggles across all indicators while **Dutiful but vulnerable** group are occupationally and educationally successful, fulfil their civic and ethical duties but show below average achievement otherwise.

Overall thriving group exceeds average achievement rate across all indicators. **Lower-educated and thriving** group follows closely with largest disparity in education and smaller ones in civic engagement and ethical behaviour. These young people, representing almost three quarters of the sample, do not raise concern.

Implications

High academic and occupational engagement may not always signal success, as a number of young adults struggle elsewhere. On the other hand, low education attainment may not always signal poor adjustment.

Holistic approaches are necessary to identify vulnerable young adults more accurately.

Next step: How do child and adolescent mental health problems predict adult group membership?

Scan for list of references

