

Economic downturns may affect children's mental health

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Research linking economic conditions and health often does not consider children's mental health problems. In a new *Health Economics* study, investigators found that U.S. children's mental health worsened as the economy weakened. The use of special education services for emotional problems also rose when economic conditions worsened.

The study, which drew on data from the 2001-2013 National Health Interview Survey, found that the effects of economic conditions on children's [mental health](#) were comparable regardless of whether investigators measured economic conditions via unemployment rates or housing price indices. In addition, the effects were seen across sexes and ages (4-11 and 12-17 years of age).

"Along with providing new insight into the determinants of child mental health, our results have implications for policy responses to poor economic conditions. We confirm that the consequences of a bad economy extend beyond labor market participants," the authors wrote. "These spillover effects to child mental health suggest that policy responses to weak [economic conditions](#) may have larger effects than anticipated. Interventions like extending unemployment benefits to cushion the loss of income, for example, may have benefits for child health that get overlooked."

More information: *Health Economics* (2019).
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