

# Adolescents born preterm have similar self-esteem/wellbeing levels to those born full-term

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New research led by the universities of Kent and Warwick has found that, contrary to previous beliefs, adolescents born preterm have the same levels of self-esteem and overall wellbeing as those born full-term.

Preterm birth, defined as birth before 37 weeks of gestation, has been previously found to be associated with an [increased risk](#) for lower academic achievement, higher mental health problems and increased difficulties in [social relationships](#) compared to those born full-term. This new study, co-led by Dr. Ayten Bilgin (Kent) alongside colleagues from Warwick, demonstrates that in contrast, preterm birth does not affect the development of subjective wellbeing and self-esteem, which are personal evaluations and thus different from school grades or psychiatric diagnoses.

The [research paper](#), published by the *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, reveals

how adolescents born very preterm (28 to 32 weeks) or moderate-to-late preterm (32 to 37 weeks) are no different from those born full-term regarding general subjective wellbeing, and family, school and physical appearance related wellbeing, and global self-esteem.

However, the study found that adolescents born very preterm perceive their peer relationships as poorer than those born full-term. This would indicate that interventions to enhance wellbeing in very preterm adolescents may be focused around improving peer relationships in childhood and adolescence.

Dr. Bilgin said: "It is very encouraging to find that preterm born adolescents show the same levels of [self-esteem](#) and wellbeing as full-term born adolescents, despite the association between [preterm birth](#) and increased mental health problems. We hope our findings will impact the focus of future studies."

Dieter Wolke, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Individual Differences at the University of Warwick's Department of Psychology, added: "It is concerning that those born preterm perceive themselves to have poorer peer relationships. Together with our previous evidence that preterm children may be more often the subject of bullying, supporting friendships and peer relations in school and leisure activities should be a priority."

**More information:** Ayten Bilgin et al, Subjective Well-Being and Self-Esteem in Preterm Born Adolescents, *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1097/DBP.0000000000000947](#)

Provided by University of Kent

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