

Youth Mental Health Infographic

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Introduction

The *Youth Mental Health Infographic* is interactive and allows you to explore in detail how different factors influence youth mental health across time.

This document is designed to be read with the Koi Tū report *Exploring factors influencing youth mental health* when using these infographics, as it explains context and why this conversation matters. To learn more about these factors, see the definitions at the end of this document.

To access the report:

1. Open the camera app on your phone
2. Hold your phone so that the QR code appears
3. Tap the notification to open the link to the report



Alternatively, you can visit this link:
informedfutures.org/youth-mental-health-factors

How to use the infographic

Our interactive infographic, *Youth Mental Health Infographic*, is designed to be used on a desktop computer, using Adobe Reader 8.1 or above, available for free here:

<https://www.adobe.com/nz/acrobat/pdf-reader.html>. This will allow you to engage with the interactive functions. Using the control panel on the right, you can switch different domains on and off to see how the factors within each domain interact and develop across a young person's life.

You will not have the best experience with this graphic if you print it or use a mobile device. You may wish to print this first page to refer back to as you explore the interactive infographic.

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Designer: Rebecca McMaster, [ReMaster](#)

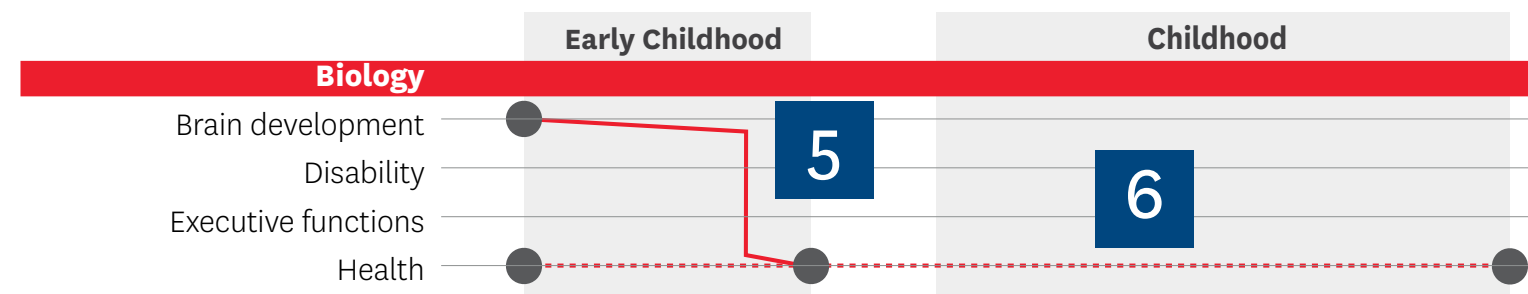
www.informedfutures.org

1 Life stage:
Turn on or off all factor categories that influence youth mental health within a particular life stage with these buttons.

2 Factor categories:
These eight broad domains group factors that contribute to youth mental health
Turn on or off each factor category that influences youth mental health across all life stages. Use the "All" button to turn all factor categories on or off.

3 Socio-historic context:
These four socio-historic context items are inextricably linked to youth mental health and cover all life stages and factors
Turn on or off each of the socio-historic context factors that influence youth mental health with these buttons.

4 Reset back to zero:
If you need to clear the screen to start again you can use this handy button.



5 Connection and interaction:
When one factor connects to another, it indicates they interact with each other. In this example brain development impacts health within early childhood.

6 Factors across life stages:
A dotted line between life stages indicates that a factor interacts through multiple life stages. In this case health in early childhood impacts childhood health.

CONTROL PANEL

Use the on/off buttons to explore how factors interact to influence mental health across life stages.

LIFE STAGE

All factor categories within a life stage

Early Childhood	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Childhood	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Adolescence	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>

FACTOR CATEGORIES

Across all life stages.
For more context on each factor, in each life stage see the definitions at the end of this document.

All	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Biology	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Contextual	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Digital	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Economic	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Education	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Family	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Peer	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Personal	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>

SOCIO-HISTORIC CONTEXT

All	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
COVID-19	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Migration	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Colonisation	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>
Inter-generational trauma	<input type="button" value="ON"/>	<input type="button" value="OFF"/>

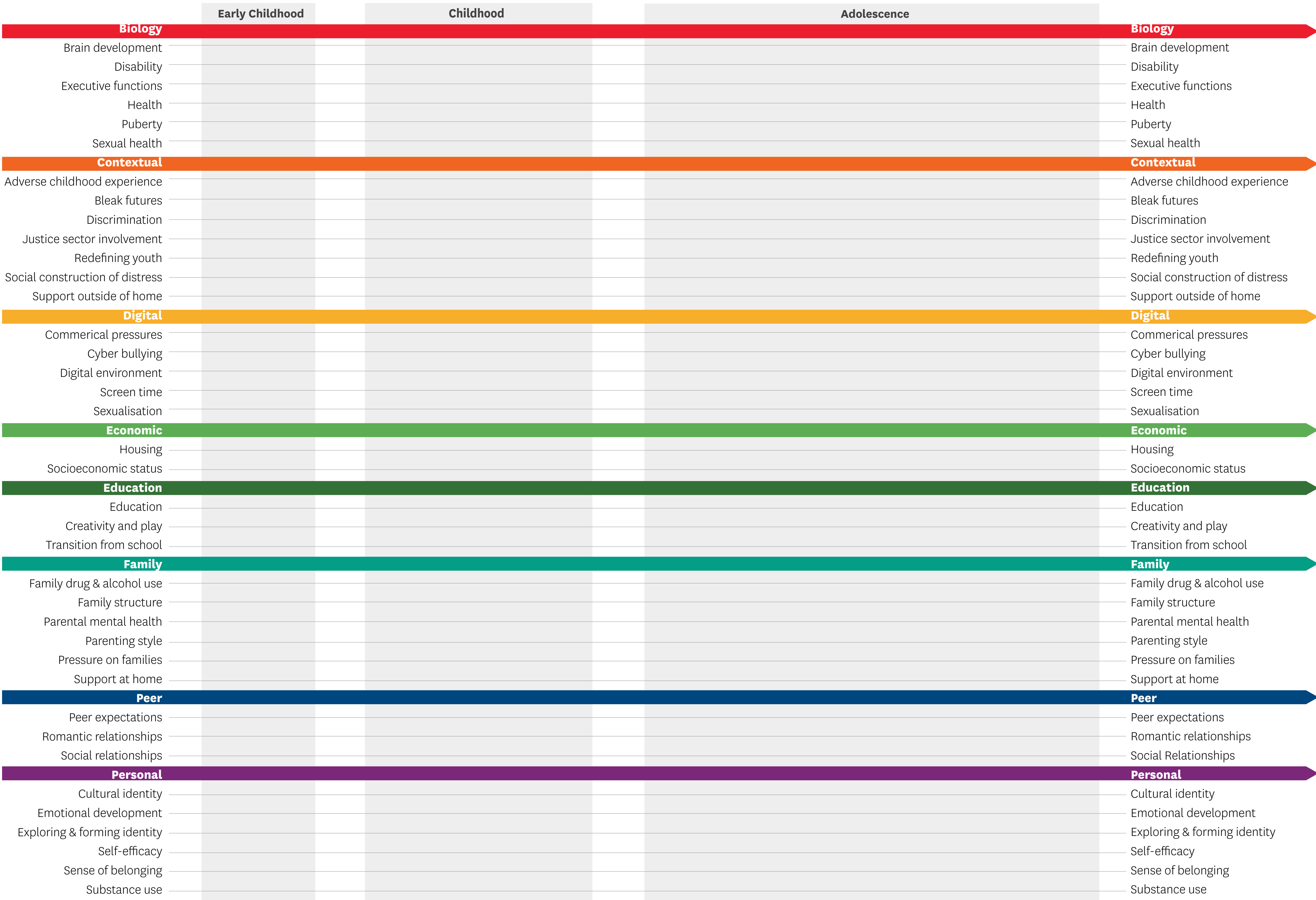
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Youth Mental Health Infographic



YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

CONTROL PANEL

Use the on/off buttons to explore how factors interact to influence mental health across life stages.

LIFE STAGE

All factor categories within a life stage

Early Childhood

Childhood

Adolescence

FACTOR CATEGORIES

Across all life stages.
For more context on each factor, in each life stage see the definitions at the end of this document.

All

Biology

Contextual

Digital

Economic

Education

Family

Peer

Personal

SOCIO-HISTORIC CONTEXT

All

+ COVID-19

+ Migration

+ Colonisation

+ Inter-generational trauma

DEFINITIONS

Domain	Factor	Early Childhood	Childhood	Adolescence
Biology	Brain development	Infancy and the early years are critical periods of brain development, with particular implications for language.	During childhood, our brain development is important for developing our executive functioning, abstract reasoning, and language. These can impact our mental health as children and later in life.	Brain development continues during adolescence, including developing pathways like advanced executive functioning, abstract reasoning, accurate evaluation of risk, and impulse control.
	Disability	Infants and toddlers with disabilities are more likely to experience mental health challenges later in life, which can be related to stress for families and difficulty accessing appropriate care to support them to thrive.	Children with disability experience additional stress compared to other children their age, including limited support in schools, difficulties socialising with peers such as bullying; stress for families, and difficulty accessing resources.	Adolescents with disabilities are more likely to experience stressors that could impact their mental health, including bullying, and may also find it harder to access effective and appropriate support.
	Executive functions		Executive functions, such as our ability to be flexible, regulate our emotions, and organise ourselves, start developing in childhood.	Adolescence is a critical stage for executive function development, when teenagers start to hone their capacity to make informed decisions and think through the options available to them. Executive functioning is also essential for regulating emotions and behavior, self-organising, and flexibly responding to situations - all of which are important components of emotional wellbeing.
	Health	When infants experience poor health it causes stress for family, changes parenting styles, and can lead to less time for socialising and in early childhood education.	Poor childhood health changes how children experience education and socialisation, how they understand and experience emotions, and increases the likelihood of experiencing traumatic events.	Health during adolescence impacts teenagers' experiences of school and the workforce and their interactions with peers. Chronic ill health in adolescence can add complexity to processes of developing agency and identity.
	Puberty			The age of puberty has decreased. Earlier pubertal timing is associated with lower academic performance, earlier alcohol use, and higher levels of depression and anxiety for adolescents. Puberty is also associated with sleep changes. Adolescents experience changes to their circadian rhythm leading to later sleep and wake, as well as a preference for longer sleep compared to adults and children. These changes often conflict with the expectations of families and the education sector.
	Sexual health			Sexual health and mental health are closely related. Young sexually active people have low rates of contraception and condom use, with implications for unwanted pregnancy and STIs, which can impact mental wellbeing.
Contextual	Adverse childhood experience	Adverse childhood experiences strongly predict wellbeing later in development and across life. For example, infants exposed to trauma in their early life, such as family violence and abuse, are more likely to experience mental health challenges later in life.	Safety is fundamental in facilitating trust, exploration, and individuality, which all relate to youth mental health. Children who are exposed to unsafe environments, such as experiencing family violence or other ACEs, are more likely to experience mental health challenges throughout their lifetime. For example, childhood trauma is highly associated with the severity and onset of many mental disorders (i.e., post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, etc).	Adolescents may be exposed to a variety of adverse childhood experiences, including neglect, abuse, and family violence. Adolescents also experience increased exposure to traumatic incidents, particularly physical violence for young men and sexual violence for young women. These trauma exposures are highly associated with mental health. After age 17, experiences like these are no longer referred to as adverse childhood experiences. However, these will still have important impacts.
	Bleak futures			More young people describe feeling that their futures are bleak and uncertain. This is related to worries about their personal futures, including the cost of living, supporting their future families, and career prospects. This also relates to broader worries, including anxiety about the economy and climate change. While a relationship with the environment can help protect mental health, many young people are deeply concerned about the environment and climate change which can cause distress. This can lead to feelings of fear and hopelessness, which are associated with poorer wellbeing and mental health.
	Discrimination		Children can experience discrimination within their communities, such as from peers, at school, and online. During childhood, children develop awareness of what discrimination is and how it makes them feel.	Though children at all ages could experience discrimination, adolescents are more likely to experience and understand discrimination. This can include individual acts of discrimination and structural discrimination. Discrimination can evoke strong negative emotions and influence systemic prejudices, perpetuating health disparities for marginalised demographics.
	Justice sector involvement		Many young people who become involved in the youth justice system experience poorer mental health outcomes with lesser support and increased levels of substance abuse.	Many young people who become involved in the youth justice system experience poorer mental health outcomes with lesser support and increased levels of substance abuse. Importantly, 17-year-olds will be trialled within the adult justice system despite their developmental stage.
	Redefining youth			Our understanding and expectations of both youth and adulthood have shifted. Typical expectations of adulthood, like financial independence, are harder to achieve - requiring additional time for young people to reach the standards of adulthood in our changing world.
	Social construction of distress			How young people learn to express their distress and emotional wellbeing relates to what they are exposed to socially, through the media, and in families.
	Support outside of home	During infancy, support outside of home such as from extended family and early childhood education increases support for families and fosters social development.	Support outside of the home, such as from extended family, teachers, community organisations, and iwi are protective for young people's wellbeing. However, many adults and community spaces where children would typically receive this support (e.g., teachers) are under-resourced, limiting their capacity to support children in this way.	As adolescents transition from spending most of their time at home to more time in the community, social supports outside of the home are increasingly important for social and emotional development as well as safety. However, many communities have few dedicated youth spaces and support structures that are engaging and low cost. A lack of support outside the home can impact young people's wellbeing.

Digital	Commerical pressures			Digital content is increasingly advertised directly to young people, raising concerns about how commercial interests intersect with young people's wellbeing. Though children are often legally protected from this, most adolescents are not. During adolescence, commercial pressures can seek to capitalise on young people's vulnerability and identity exploration (e.g., content targeted to teenagers selling weight loss programs).
	Cyber bullying			Cyberbullying has been a concern for the past few decades. It continues to be a prevalent issue for youth, with the anonymity of cyberbullying making it harder to monitor and address in traditional forums like schools. Cyberbullying has important implications for emotional wellbeing.
	Digital environment		The current social media, internet, and digital climate can give children access to content and information they may not have been provided the necessary critical thinking skills to process and comprehend. It can also expose children to unwanted contact and cyber-bullying with impacts for their safety, emotional development, and self-efficacy later in life.	Today's young people were raised in a digital environment, but the way they interact with and the content of their digital environments can have significant implications for their mental health. Young people often report that the digital environment allows them to connect to others. This may be particularly protective for young people with minority identities, helping them find belonging and sources of support. However, social media has been associated with impacts on body-image and self-efficacy.
	Screen time	When infants are exposed to high levels of screen time, this reduces their time in imaginative play and socialisation which are important for their development. Less is known about the impacts about screen time on infant brain development and early childhood education, though many have suggested screen time may impact on these domains too.	High levels of screen time for children can influence sleep quality, hyperactivity/inattention, internalising problems, and social pressures, which seems to be associated with lower mental health and perceived quality of life in young people.	High levels of screen time influences sleep quality, hyperactivity/inattention, internalising problems, and social pressures, which seems to be associated with lower mental health and perceived quality of life in young people.
	Sexualisation			Many young people, particularly young women, may be exposed to unwanted contact via their digital environment, including harassment and sexually explicit material. Additionally, young people today have high rates of accessing pornography, leading to concerns about how pornography impacts sexual health, body image, sexualisation, violence, and addiction.
Economic	Housing	During early life, housing instability can cause significant stress for parents and families. Additionally, inadequate housing is associated with poor health for infants, with implications for their broader development and wellbeing.	Secure housing provides a sense of belonging, a point for social connection, and security/protection from adverse social conditions, which all improve youth mental health; in contrast, housing instability and eviction are negatively correlated with youth mental health.	In adolescence, housing instability introduces additional stress and pressure to adolescents that can influence mental health. This can include moving schools frequently, worry about family members, and limited space to conduct school work.
	Socioeconomic status	Socio-economic status has implications for exposure to stress and access to support. These can significantly impact mental health across the lifespan.	Socio-economic status has implications for exposure to stress and access to support. In childhood, socio-economic status also impacts education. These can significantly impact mental health across the lifespan.	Socio-economic status has implications for exposure to stress and access to support. Adolescents are likely to be aware of their family's economic position, and often take on work in and outside of the home to support their household. For teenagers, socio-economic status can relate to education, transition to the workforce, and can cause significant stress and anxiety.
Education	Education	Early childhood education impacts how infants learn to interact with others and understand and express emotions. ECE also impacts language development and executive function, which relate to children's wellbeing and experience later in the education system.	Children's education experiences can positively impact mental health, such as if they can be creative and have strong connections to teachers, or negatively, such as if those they interact with at school have poor expectations of them.	Most adolescents will engage in some form of education – whether college or alternative education – and experience of this can impact how they learn to function effectively, express emotions, and socialise with peers. Education can also cause stress for young people with impacts on their emotional wellbeing and self-efficacy.
	Creativity and play	Unstructured, diverse and creative play supports brain development, socialisation, and emotional development.	As children progress through childhood, unstructured play becomes less frequent. Unstructured play appears to be less common for today's children, related to changes to contextual changes and changes to education, parenting styles, and the digital environment. This has implications for social and emotional development.	Many adolescents will be engaged in creative pursuits. Creativity is important for emotional development, and creative pursuits can also provide supportive communities, a sense of belonging, and support identity formation.
	Transition from school			The transition from formal education is particularly vulnerable and stressful, with high pressure, reduced support, and often added financial burden. This can be stressful whether young people are leaving school to transition to the workforce or higher education, and many youth face high academic pressure. This can be additionally stressful for those who leave school for other reasons, such as due to poor health or being excluded.
Family	Family drug & alcohol use	Substance use during pregnancy has significant implications for brain development and is associated with poorer mental health outcomes for children. Infants whose families are involved in harmful substance use during their early life are more likely to be exposed to substances and to experience psychosocial stress.	Children with a family history of substance abuse are more likely to experience psychosocial difficulties and a lifetime risk of mental health problems.	Adolescents may experience stress from family members who harmfully use substances, and may take on additional burden as a consequence including driving and childcare. Familial drug and alcohol use can have wide reaching impacts on adolescents including on socio-economic status, pressure on the family, and personal substance use.
	Family structure	Non-traditional family structures have become increasingly more common. Children who experience family breakdowns, shared residence arrangements, and single parents tend to have poorer mental health outcomes than those in traditional family structures.	Family structure and changes or instability to structure impacts young people's wellbeing. For example, parenting structures such as parental separation, resident and non-resident parenting, blended family systems, and parental involvement correlate with the quality of youth mental health.	Family structures such as single parent households and split living arrangements can cause stress for adolescents and limit the support available to them within the household. Other structures, like older or younger relatives needing support, can also impact young people's transition from school.
	Parental mental health	The influence of maternal mental illness on their children has been extensively researched and correlates with poor mental health outcomes for young people. Maternal depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia are most indicative of risk of youth mental health problems. Other evidence suggests paternal mental health and mental health within the wider family has implications for young people's lifetime mental health.	When parents and family members of children experience mental health challenges, this can increase the risk of mental health challenges for youth. Mental health challenges can cause significant stress for families and children and influence children's emotional development.	During adolescence, young people may take on greater responsibility for parents and family members with mental health challenges. Poor mental health in the wider family can influence young people's development and contribute to significant stress and pressure.

Family	Parenting style	Different parenting styles are associated with different outcomes for young people. Additionally, parenting styles are shifting in relation to changing social attitudes. Parents appear to have greater risk adversity (i.e., they're more worried about their children being hurt) and greater structure (i.e., their children are less likely to have unstructured play time) during early life.	Parenting styles during childhood have implications for how young people socialise, develop emotional, and experience their home environment. Many believe that parenting styles have shifted in recent years. Boundaries may feel 'looser', with children having more agency than in the past and less oversight of their education.	With the increased complexity of adolescence, many parents and guardians struggle to parent teenagers and find themselves under-supported, which can increase stress and vulnerability.
	Pressure on families	Parents and families who experience economic, social, and familial pressures may have greater stress. Familial and parental stress highly correlates with emotional and behavioral problems for young people throughout their lifetime.	Pressures on families, including changes to family structures, economic pressures, and supporting children in school, can create stress and impact children's experience of home and family.	During the transition to adolescence and young adulthood, pressures on the family increasingly fall on young people, which can negatively impact youth mental health.
	Support at home	'During early childhood, support at home is essential for development. Infants and young children form attachments to their primary caregivers. Those attachments will impact how their social emotional development throughout the lifespan'	Children's primary sources of support are typically their home environment. When the quality of support and interactions at home are good, young people are less likely to experience adverse outcomes and are more likely to develop resilience.	Adolescents typically receive less support from home than younger children. However, support from home is essential for wellbeing, including emotional development, education, managing the transition from school, and navigating adolescence safely.
Peer	Peer expectations			In adolescence, young people experience the rapid development of the brain's socioaffective circuitry, which increases sensitivity to social rewards and concern over peer evaluation. Young people become particularly concerned with how their peers perceive them.
	Romantic relationships			Adolescents often begin exploring romantic relationships. These relationships can be supportive, protective, and allow for identity exploration – and can also be associated with stress, pressure, and victimisation. Importantly, exploring and forming romantic relationships is an important part of identity exploration, including forming sexual identity.
	Social relationships	Infants begin learning how to engage with their peers and adults through social interactions. This process is an important stage of developing social skills later in life.	Children spend more time with their peers, socialising through play and shared experiences such as school and sports. These social relationships and interactions foster social skills development, supportive connections, and a sense of belonging with implications for youth mental health. When children experience bullying or social exclusion, this can have profound impacts on their long term wellbeing.	Peer group socialisation and relationships are important characteristics of adolescence, and are important for identity formation and emotional development. Adolescents who have difficulty interacting with their peers socially or who experience bullying are more likely to become socially isolated. Social isolation and an absence of high-quality social interactions with peers are associated with poorer mental health.
Personal	Cultural identity		Strength of cultural identity is related to sense of belonging, sense of self, and connection which are all protective factors for youth mental health. Cultural identity is related to broader socio-historic and contextual factors, including colonisation and migration	Strength of cultural identity is related to sense of belonging, sense of self, and connection which are all protective factors for youth mental health. For adolescents, cultural identity plays an important role in identity formation and decision making around the future
	Emotional development	Emotional development in early childhood is closely related to infant temperament, social interactions, attachment to caregivers, and modeling.	During childhood, children begin learning how to identify, understand, and express their emotions including how to regulate their own emotions. Childhood emotional development has important implications for adolescent and lifelong emotional wellbeing. Children who have difficulties with emotional development may have challenges in school and interactions with peers.	Adolescents will often experience significant changes to their emotional wellbeing, including mood changes associated with puberty. This is a time at which many young people will learn how to express their emotions, coping skills for challenging emotions, and how to seek help for emotional support. These all have important implications for lifelong emotional wellbeing.
	Exploring & forming identity			Identity exploration and formation is one of the most important activities of adolescent development. This involves establishing independence from adults, forming peer relationships, and exploring a sense of self and belonging, which can be a challenging and confusing time for adolescents. This will often also involve exploring sexual and gender identity. As young people explore and develop their identities, they will often begin developing group identities and peer groups with important implications for socialisation, justice sector involvement, risk taking behavior, and how distress is understood and expressed.
	Self-efficacy			Self-efficacy includes young people's beliefs about their capacity and their potential. Self-efficacy begins to form during childhood, and during adolescence can impact on many domains of a young person's life. Importantly, self-efficacy has significant implications for identity formation and emotional wellbeing during adolescence and adulthood.
	Sense of belonging		A sense of belonging is often characterised by feeling valued and accepted by other people, which increases connectedness and bonding for young people, and feeling connected to space and place.	In adolescence, sense of belonging is highly dynamic as the transition into adulthood and into society begins. This has the potential to influence youth mental health depending on how these transitions happen.
	Substance use			Many adolescents will begin experimenting with substances. While some substance use has declined in recent years, including cigarette smoking, other forms, like vaping, are rising in popularity. Adolescents who use substances earlier or more harmfully than their peers are more likely to experience psychosocial stressors, poor mental health, and addiction.

SOCIO-HISTORIC CONTEXT

Covid-19	Global research suggests that young people's overall mental health declined during the COVID pandemic – although some young people might have benefited from things like more family support at home.	Migration	Migrants and the children of migrants are particularly vulnerable to disparities within New Zealand, including health disparities. Additionally, migration can impact supports for family and cultural identity.	Colonisation	New Zealand's colonial history has had profound effects on institutional, systemic, and economic disparities between Māori and non-Māori, perpetuating health and mental health disparities.	Inter-generational trauma	Trauma can be transferred generationally increasing young people's vulnerability to mental health issues such as mood disorders, substance use disorders, and anxiety disorders. This is particularly concerning for young people experiencing the intergenerational impacts of colonisation and war or conflict.
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