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Why peer relationships matter: evidence on social connection and wellbeing for policy

Dr. Monsurul Hoq, Dr. Neha Swami, Dr. Kristen Power, Dr. Ebony Biden, Catherine Andersson

AIFS Conference, Melbourne & Sep 9 - 11

The policy gap

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Peer relationships are central to young lives but often sit outside policy design.

Friendships shape identity, social skills and belonging

They become increasingly important through adolescence and early adulthood.

They can protect against vulnerability

Supportive, trusting peer connections may reduce exposure to poor wellbeing and safety outcomes.

Yet they are under-recognised in policy

Services often focus on individuals and families, with less attention to peer environments.

Peer connection may be protective

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A synthesis of AIFS publications using nationally representative LSAC data.

Parents' relationship quality

Interparental relationship happiness and conflict

Peer relationship quality

Trust, communication and peer challenges

Wellbeing and safety

Sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, suicidal thoughts and behaviors

Childhood (4 – 9)

Early adolescence (12 - 17)

Late Adolescence or early adulthood (18 - 23)

Peer relationships offer a useful policy lever

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Build the environments where supportive peer connection can happen.

Inclusive schools

Belonging, safety and peer trust are everyday conditions for learning and wellbeing.

Community spaces

Connection needs places where young people can participate, communicate and be seen.

Youth services

Services can recognise peer connection as part of prevention and early support.

Help shape the future of LSAC

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Consultation for LSAC Wave 12 content

As participants move through their 20s, we're inviting input from researchers, policymakers, service providers and community organisations to help identify the most important topics and questions for Wave 12.

Through a short survey, you'll be able to suggest new topics and questions for inclusion in future waves, and provide feedback on existing content that may no longer be needed.

Submit your ideas by **Friday 18th September**