

Frequent school moves can increase the risk of psychotic symptoms in early adolescence

February 18 2014



Researchers at Warwick Medical School have shown that frequently moving schools during childhood can increase the risk of psychotic symptoms in later years.

The study, published in the *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, found that school mobility during [childhood](#) heightens the risk of developing psychotic-like [symptoms](#) in early adolescence by up to 60%.

Suffering from psychotic-like symptoms at young age is strongly associated with [mental health problems](#) in adulthood, including [psychotic disorders](#) and suicide.

Professor Swaran Singh, who led the study, explained, "Changing schools can be very stressful for students. Our study found that the process of moving schools may itself increase the risk of [psychotic symptoms](#) – independent of other factors. But additionally, being involved in bullying, sometimes as a consequence of repeated school moves, may exacerbate risk for the individual."

At the age of 12, participants in the study were interviewed to assess for the presence of psychotic-like symptoms including hallucinations, delusions and thought interference in the previous six months. Those that had moved school three or more times were found to be 60% more likely to display at least one definite psychotic symptom.

The authors suggested that moving schools often may lead to feelings of low self-esteem and a sense of social defeat. This feeling of being excluded from the majority could also render physiological consequences leading to sensitisation of the mesolimbic dopamine system, heightening the risk of psychotic-like symptoms in vulnerable individuals.

Dr Cath Winsper, Senior Research Fellow at Warwick Medical School and part of the study group said, "It's clear that we need to keep school mobility in mind when clinically assessing young people with psychotic disorders. It should be explored as a matter of course as the impact can be both serious and potentially long lasting. Schools should develop strategies to help these students to establish themselves in their new environment."

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: Frequent school moves can increase the risk of psychotic symptoms in early adolescence (2014, February 18) retrieved 4 May 2024 from

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