

Disadvantaged kids prescribed antipsychotic medication more often

May 14 2018, by Robyn Mills

A new study has shown that Australian children and teens from disadvantaged families are more likely to be prescribed antipsychotic medication than others in the same age group.

Social policy researcher Amy Kaim from the Robinson Research Institute at the University of Adelaide led the research which used data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), cross-matched with information from Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

"The preliminary findings indicate that a larger proportion of [children](#) and teens from disadvantaged families are being placed on [antipsychotic](#) medication than others in the general population," Ms Kaim said.

"A larger proportion of children and teens taking the medication were boys, in lower-income families, with an unemployed primary caregiver, who were living in single-parent households.

"Their parents were more likely to report that their child had behavioural difficulties and they were more likely to have repeated a grade in school and to have lower school achievement.

"These findings strengthen the evidence that children from disadvantaged families are more likely to be prescribed antipsychotics, use more psychological services and have worse health and educational outcomes."

The study will be presented to the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) Annual Congress from 13–17 May in Auckland.

Ms Kaim said the study team identified key risk factors which were linked to children being prescribed [antipsychotic medication](#) at higher rates than others.

"The risk factors were being a child or teen in a family that was dealing with [stressful life events](#) and financial difficulties," she said.

"Other [risk factors](#) include parenting practices in the [family](#) and whether parents themselves were in psychological distress.

"The social and emotional wellbeing of the individual child and their approach to learning could also compound those risks."

Ms Kaim said the study would continue to monitor the children and teens' [medication](#) use as they move through adolescence into adulthood.

"We hope that our study will contribute to a growing recognition of the need to look at the social factors which influence kids' mental health, rather than resorting to antipsychotics for the treatment of behavioural problems in Australian children and adolescents.

The President of RANZCP, Dr. Kym Jenkins said: "This study is a strong reminder of the importance of considering social and psychological facts in particular in child and adolescent mental health."

Provided by University of Adelaide

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