

Research finds that poor quality school buildings are related to schoolchildren's anxiety

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New research has found that a student's perception of their school building conditions is related to their anxiety. The researchers found that

students who had a negative perception of their school's physical environment reported higher levels of anxiety.

The [research](#) was carried out by researchers from Queen's University Belfast, University of Johannesburg, University of Jyväskylä, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare and the University of Eastern Finland, and has been published in the *British Journal of Social Psychology*

The research was carried out on Finnish lower secondary [school](#) students in 2017 and 2019. A total of 71,392 students from 678 schools took part in the study in 2017, and 85,989 students from 704 schools contributed in 2019.

Dr. Ian Shuttleworth, senior lecturer in [human geography](#) from the School of Natural and Built Environment at Queen's said, "In light of the RAAC concrete issue in the UK earlier this year, our research is timely as it has found that a pleasant and well-maintained school building supports schoolchildren's mental well-being.

"The data suggests that a poor school physical environment was related to pupil [anxiety](#) most for those students who perceived the [school environment](#) worse than the average perception of all pupils, and also in those schools where school group identity or ethos was weakest. This suggests that poor school building quality in the UK will have unequal individual outcomes, leading to greater anxiety for students who are sensitive to their [physical environment](#) and who study in schools with weaker collective social identities."

Professor Eerika Finell, professor in [social psychology](#) in the Department of Social Sciences at the University of Eastern Finland said, "Although schoolchildren's anxiety symptoms were already relatively common before 2020, significantly more schoolchildren presented symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our research is pertinent as

not only are we seeing increased anxiety symptoms among schoolchildren, COVID-19 has also highlighted the importance of good quality indoor environments for our children and adolescents.

"In our study, we found that the student's perception of their school building conditions was associated with their self-reported anxiety, and this is in line with previous research showing that good quality school buildings are important for [educational attainment](#) and student comfort.

"However, school conditions are often unsatisfactory- toilets, furniture or whole school buildings can be in bad repair; classrooms can be too noisy; and temperatures can be too hot or too cold. This is a true problem, and more attention should be paid on school building conditions."

More information: Eerika Finell et al, The identification environment matters: Students' social identification, perceived physical school environment, and anxiety—A cross-level interaction model, *British Journal of Social Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/bjso.12686](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12686)

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