

Lonely children more likely to experience psychosis, new study finds

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A new study suggests that children who felt lonely for more than six months before the age of 12 are more likely to experience an episode of psychosis than children who did not, with women more affected than men. The study was presented at [EPA 2024](#).

Psychosis refers to a collection of symptoms that affect a person's mind, where there has been some loss of contact with reality. During an episode of psychosis, a person may have difficulty recognizing what is real and what is not. Symptoms of psychosis include hallucinations, delusions and confused thoughts.

In some instances, psychosis may be a [symptom](#) of other mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, [bipolar disorder](#), or [severe depression](#). Symptoms of schizophrenia are often categorized as positive (any change in behavior or thoughts, such as hallucinations or delusions), negative (where people appear to withdraw from the world around them).

Loneliness is defined as the subjective feeling of distress associated with a lack of meaningful relationships, regardless of the amount of social contact, whereas social isolation is defined as the objective lack of social contact or support.

In an observational, case-control study, researchers assessed loneliness in children with the question "Have you ever felt lonely for more than six months before the age of 12?" and differentiated this from social isolation by using the 'peer relationships' item from the Premorbid Adjustment Scale. The study sample comprised 285 patients who had experienced their first episode of psychosis and 261 controls.

Key findings from the study include:

- Loneliness in [childhood](#) was associated with an increased likelihood of experiencing a psychotic episode (adjusted odds ratio; aOR: 2.17, 95% CI [1.40–3.51], $p=.002$) and this association remained significant after controlling for objective social isolation in childhood (aOR:2.70, IC 95% [1.58–4.62], p

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