

Moving school may increase risk of psychotic symptoms in late teens

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Hallucinations, delusions and disturbed thoughts in 18 year olds may in part be due to frequently moving school as a child.

A study from the University of Warwick published in the *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* has found that children who move schools often are at greater risk of developing psychotic symptoms as teenagers than those who experience fewer school moves. Psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations, delusions, and confused or disturbed thoughts can be a precursor to [psychotic disorders](#).

The study was funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Researchers led by Professor Swaran Singh from the University of Warwick's Medical School and Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust found that children who had moved schools repeatedly had over a two-fold increased odds of

developing at least one psychotic symptom by 18 years of age.

More than 4,000 18 year olds were interviewed and of the 185 who had experienced four or more school moves, almost 10% developed at least one psychotic symptom. This was in contrast to 4% of children who had not moved schools repeatedly.

Professor Singh said: "The study findings suggest that school moves in particular are harmful and may increase feelings of isolation and stress in those who have already experienced social exclusion. School moves may also indicate other underlying problems, such as family breakdown, which may further contribute to an increased risk of psychosis."

School change was linked to psychotic symptoms even after taking into account important risk factors for psychosis including cannabis use, bullying, ethnicity and social disadvantage.

The study used data from Children of the 90s; a study which has tracked the lives of thousands of people from birth in 1991 to the current day. The participants were interviewed at 18 years to see if they had experienced any psychotic symptoms in the past six months.

A previous study by the same researchers looked at associations with psychotic symptoms at 12 years. The study, published in the *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%. In addition, the association between school moves and psychotic symptoms was partly due to an increased risk of bullying. The present study extends this work by demonstrating long-term associations between school moves and psychotic symptoms.

Findings from these two studies suggest that programmes aimed at reducing school mobility and associated peer problems may help reduce risk of psychosis.

Co-author Dr Catherine Winsper of Warwick Medical School said: "Although school mobility appears to be a strong risk factor for [psychotic symptoms](#) in early and late adolescence, the majority of children who experience repeated school moves will not develop psychosis."

More information: Catherine Winsper et al. School mobility during childhood predicts psychotic symptoms in late adolescence, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jcpp.12572](#)

Provided by University of Warwick

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