

CLAHRC BITE Brokering Innovation Through Evidence

05 A bite-sized summary of a piece of research supported by NIHR CLAHRC West Midlands

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School mobility as a pathway to psychosis in young people

Background

- Psychotic-like symptoms (**PLIKS**) are commonly experienced in childhood and adulthood. PLIKS in childhood increase the risk of **psychotic disorder** in adulthood.
- Children who are residentially mobile are more likely to experience **social adversity**, such as financial problems and family dysfunction, which are risk factors for psychosis.
- We hypothesised that the stress of **changing schools** frequently in childhood may also increase the risk of psychotic-like symptoms.
- The aim of this study was to test whether changing schools **increases the risk** of psychotic-like symptoms in early adolescence, independently of other risk factors.

Does changing schools increase the risk of psychotic-like symptoms in adolescents?

Findings

A community sample of 6,448 mothers and their children were assessed for psychosocial adversities (from birth-2yrs), how often they moved house and changed school (up to 9yrs), incidences of peer difficulties such as bullying (up to 10yrs). The presence of psychotic-like symptoms (PLIKS) were then assessed at age 12.

- **School mobility** (i.e. changing schools 3 or more times) was significantly associated with PLIKS, both directly and indirectly.
- The association between school mobility and PLIKS was independent of other risk factors such as family problems and financial difficulty.
- School mobility was also associated with **increased risk of bullying**, which is known to be a risk factor for development of psychotic like symptoms.
- After adjustment for all other risk factors, changing schools led to an approximately **1.5 times** increased risk, and being both a bully and victim of bullying, led to an approximately **2.5 times** increased risk of PLIKS.

The findings indicate that mobile students may represent a high risk population for developing psychotic-like symptoms in adolescence.

References

Singh SP, Winsper C, Wolker D, Bryson A. School Mobility and Prospective Pathways to Psychotic-Like Symptoms in Early Adolescence: A Prospective Birth Cohort Study. *J Am Acad Child Psy.* 2014; **53**(5): 518-27. [[Link](#)]



Recommendations for practice

Strategies to help mobile students establish themselves within new schools (e.g. 'mobility support workers') may help to reduce the risk of PLIKS.

Clinicians should explore the history of school mobility when assessing the mental health of young people.

What is NIHR CLAHRC West Midlands?

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