

Cardiovascular risk factors extremely high in people with psychosis

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Extremely high levels of cardiovascular risk factors have been found in people with established psychosis, with central obesity evident in over 80 per cent of participants, in a study by researchers from the NIHR Biomedical Research Centre at the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) and King's College London.

In the largest study of its kind in the UK, drawing on a sample of more than 400 outpatients with psychosis, it was discovered that nearly half of the sample were obese (48 per cent), with a [body mass index](#) (BMI) of 30 or more. Additionally, nearly all women and most men had a waist circumference above the International Diabetes Federation's (IDF) threshold for central obesity. According to this measure 83 per cent of patients were centrally obese: 95 per cent of females and 74 per cent of males. Central obesity refers to excessive fat around the stomach and abdomen, to the extent that it is likely to have a negative impact on health.

The majority of participants tested (57 per cent) met the IDF's criteria for metabolic syndrome, which is a cluster of biochemical and physiological abnormalities associated with the development of heart disease, stroke and type-2 diabetes. A fifth met the criteria for diabetes and 30 per cent showed a higher risk of going on to develop diabetes.

Although [cardiovascular risk factors](#) are common in psychosis, this UK study reports some of the highest rates worldwide, reinforcing the need to incorporate weight and cardiovascular risk assessment and management into the routine care of people with psychosis.

Data was collected as part of the NIHR-funded IMPaCT trial and the study took place within community mental health teams in five mental health NHS Trusts in urban and rural locations across England.

The study, published today in *Psychological Medicine*, also identified lifestyle choices likely to add to cardiovascular risk, with 62 per cent of the sample reported to be smokers, greatly in excess of the general UK population smoking rates of 20 per cent. Lack of exercise was also commonplace, with only 12 per cent of participants engaging in high intensity physical activity.

Dr Fiona Gaughran, senior author from the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) at King's College London, and the National Psychosis Unit at SLaM, said: 'We already know that diagnosis of a psychotic illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder is associated with a reduced life expectancy of between 10 to 25 years. This mortality gap is largely due to natural causes, including cardiac disease. The worryingly high levels of cardiovascular risk shown in our study indicate that a much greater emphasis on physical activity is needed for those with severe mental illnesses, as well as a more significant focus on supporting attempts to quit smoking.'

'While previous research has demonstrated that people gain weight on starting anti-psychotics, our study of people who have had psychosis for nearly 16 years on average found no difference in the rates of cardiovascular risk between the various different anti-psychotic medications. Research is urgently needed into the best ways to reduce existing [cardiovascular risk](#) in people with psychosis, prevent weight gain and promote healthy lifestyles in the early stages of the illness.'

Provided by King's College London

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