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Prevalence of psychotic symptoms in children needing inpatient care: relationship to diagnosis

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Background: Psychotic symptoms, marking impaired reality testing, are considered a hallmark of psychotic disorders. However, several lines of research point towards these symptoms also being highly prevalent both in non-clinical populations and in other psychiatric disorders. There is also evidence to suggest that their prevalence is even higher in children and young people, reaching up to 17% in epidemiological samples. There is limited research on the prevalence of psychotic symptoms in young clinical populations. The present study aimed to assess the prevalence of psychotic symptoms in a 6 to 12-year-old clinical population of an inpatient setting. **Method:** Clinical records of all patients of a national UK children's unit from 2009 to 2017 were examined for the presence of psychotic symptoms and their relationship to diagnosis at discharge. **Results:** One hundred and eighty-five (185) children were included in the study. Psychotic symptoms were highly prevalent in this young clinical population, reaching 63.8%, regardless of diagnosis at discharge. Hallucinations (58.4%) were more prevalent than delusions (35.1%). As expected, all children with schizophrenia spectrum disorders experienced psychotic symptoms. **Conclusions:** The present study is the first to examine the prevalence of delusions and hallucinations across diagnoses in children needing inpatient care. Psychotic symptoms were very common in children without a diagnosis of schizophrenia spectrum disorder. Given the high frequency of psychotic symptoms in this severely affected clinical population, it is possible that they represent a marker of clinical severity.

Table 1. Psychotic Symptoms Percentages among Diagnoses.

DIAGNOSIS	TOTAL
<i>EARLY-ONSET SCHIZOPHRENIA</i>	100%
<i>INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY</i>	86.7%
<i>ANXIETY</i>	67.2%
<i>AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER</i>	65.7%

<i>DEPRESSION</i>	65.5%
<i>HYPERKINETIC DISORDER</i>	65.4%
<i>EATING DISORDER</i>	60%
<i>OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER</i>	53.6%