

PARANOIA AND MISTRUST IN TEENAGERS

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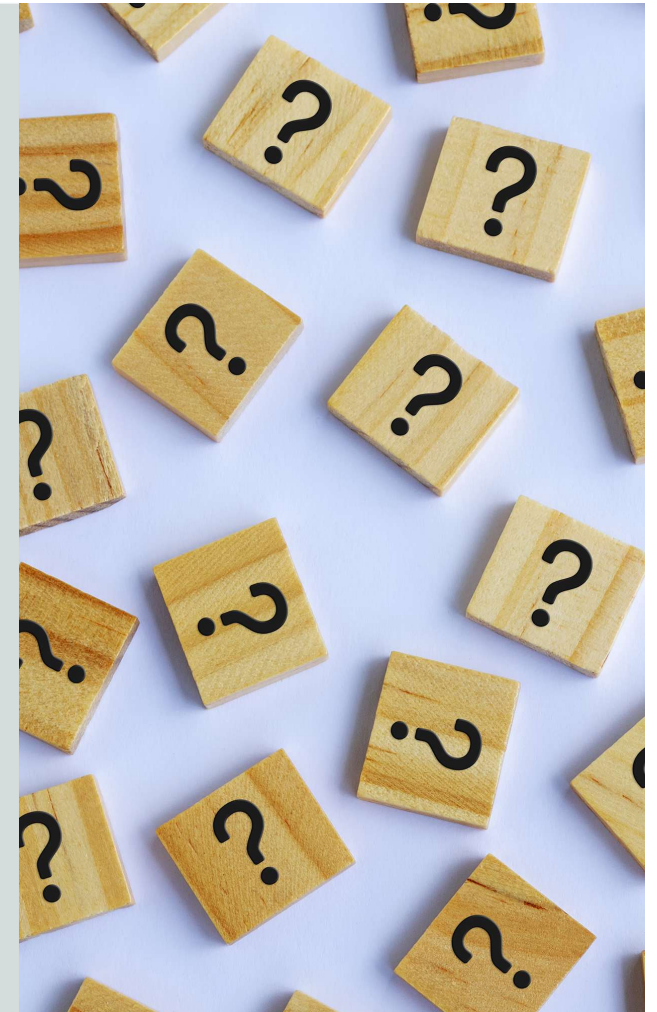
VIDEO

[TRUST video \(1080p\).mp4 - Google Drive](#)

We would love this to be shared amongst schools, parents/carers and healthcare professionals.
Please email jessicakingston@rhul.ac.uk for a copy

WHAT IS PARANOIA?

- Exaggerated belief that others want to harm you
- Can be psychological, physical, financial or social
- Ranges from mild mistrust to more severe worries
- More common in children and teens than other age groups
- Weekly paranoid thoughts in 20-30% of UK school going teens (Bird et al. 2019)



THE PARANOIA HIERARCHY

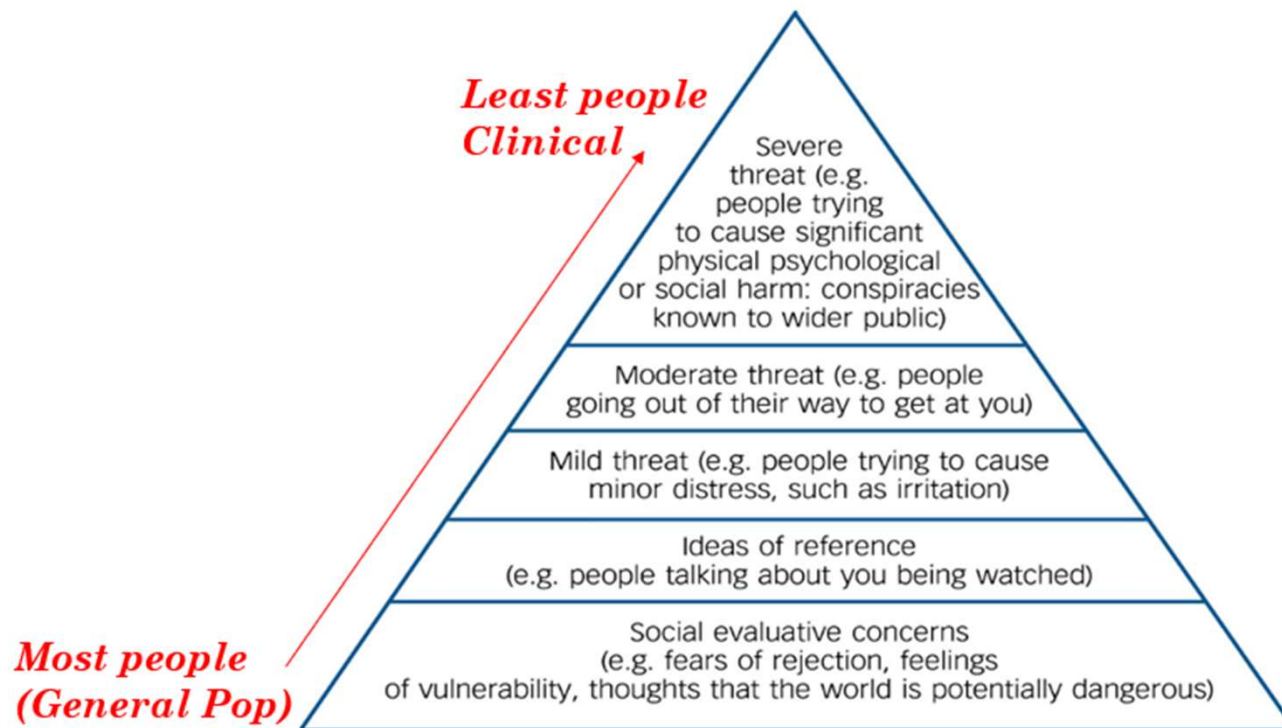


Fig. 2 The paranoia hierarchy [14]

WHAT PARANOIA LOOKS LIKE

*Revised Green et al.
Paranoid Thoughts
Scale
(R-GPTS; Freeman et
al. 2021)*

	Not at all					Totally
1. Certain individuals have had it in for me.	0	1	2	3	4	
2. People wanted me to feel threatened, so they stared at me.	0	1	2	3	4	
3. I was certain people did things in order to annoy me.	0	1	2	3	4	
4. I was convinced there was a conspiracy against me.	0	1	2	3	4	
5. I was sure someone wanted to hurt me.	0	1	2	3	4	
6. I couldn't stop thinking about people wanting to confuse me.	0	1	2	3	4	
7. I was distressed by being persecuted.	0	1	2	3	4	
8. It was difficult to stop thinking about people wanting to make me feel bad.	0	1	2	3	4	
9. People have been hostile towards me on purpose.	0	1	2	3	4	
10. I was angry that someone wanted to hurt me.	0	1	2	3	4	

SOCIAL VULNERABILITY AND PARANOIA IN TEENS



Key life stage for development of “social brain”: Brain areas associated with *theory of mind*, *mentalization*, *abstract thinking* and *introspection* undergo rapid growth



Re-orientation to peers: heightened importance of peer relationships and belonging: determines overall self-worth



Hyper-aware of potential for *negative social evaluation*, *fear of rejection*

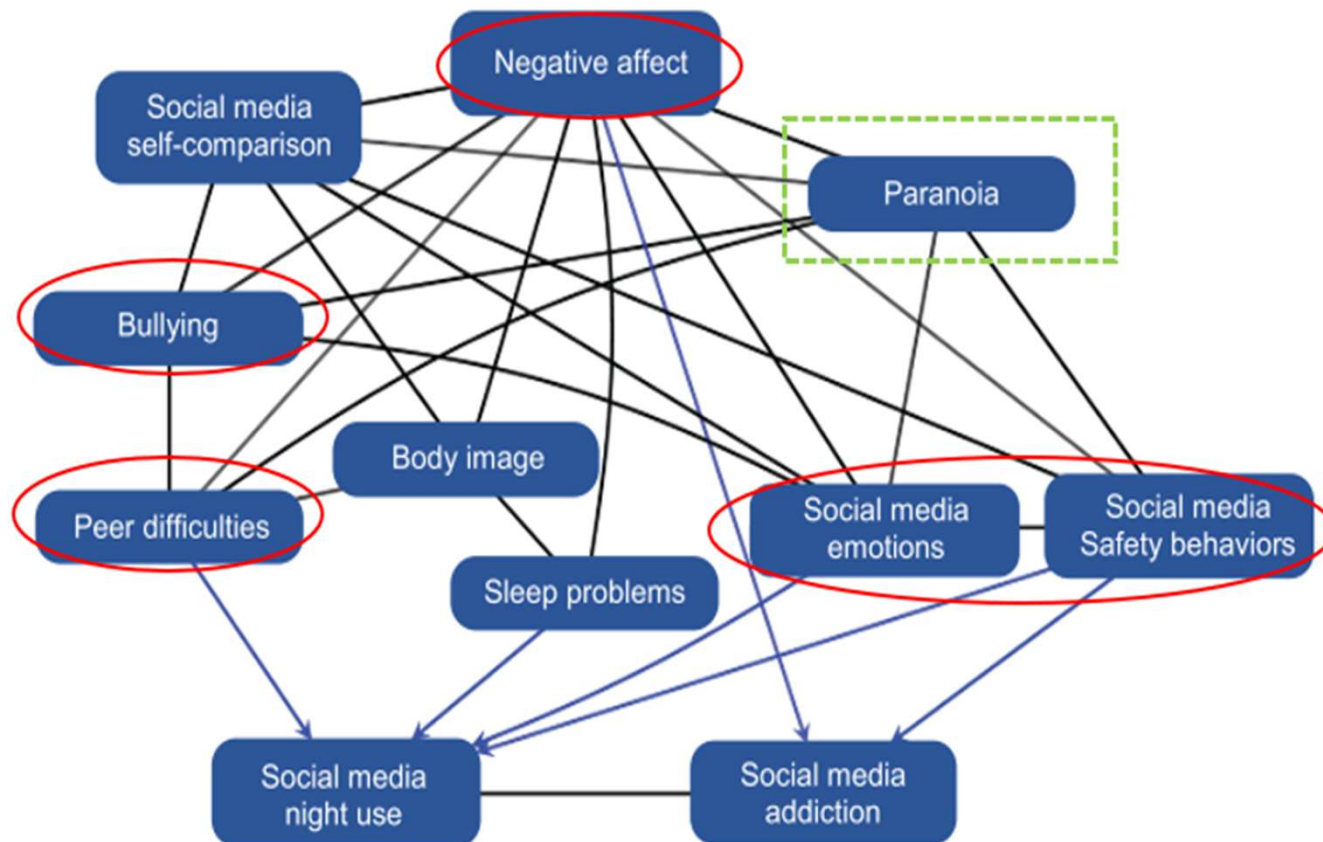


Heightened risk of negative social experiences: *bullying*, *cyberbullying*, *harassment* with a more corrosive impact



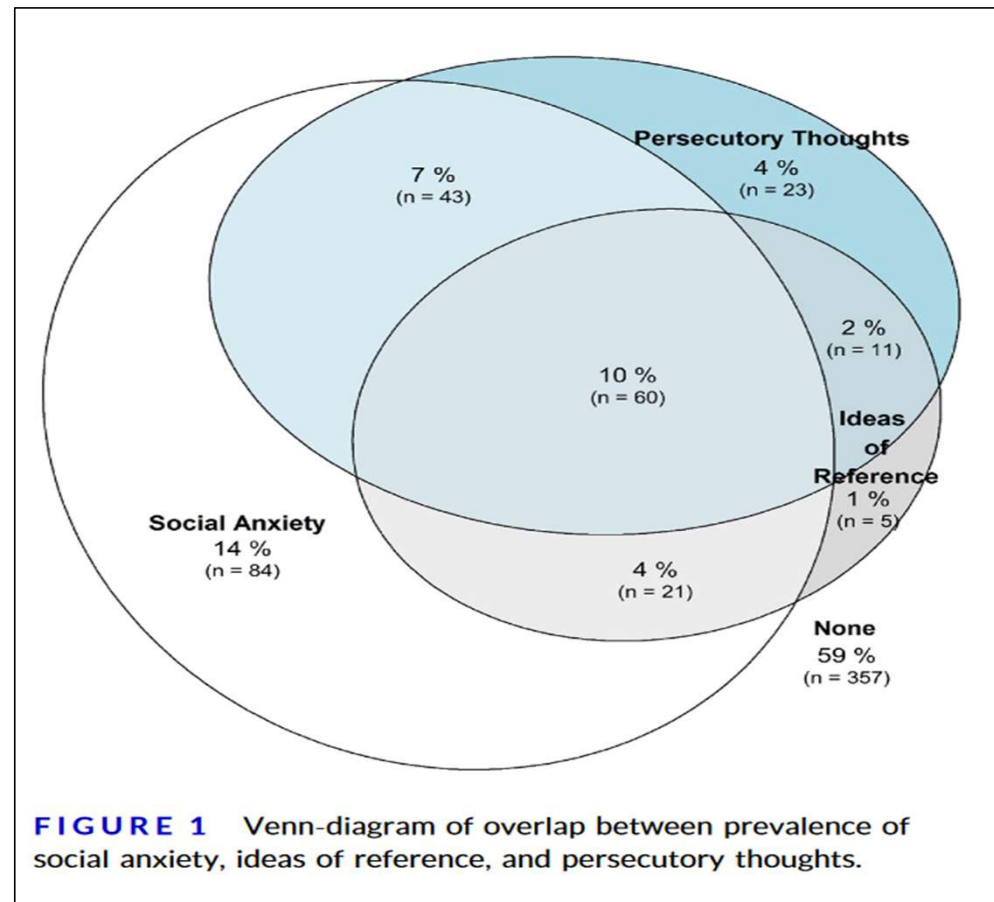
Feelings of vulnerability and threat i.e., paranoia may follow

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH PARANOIA IN TEENS

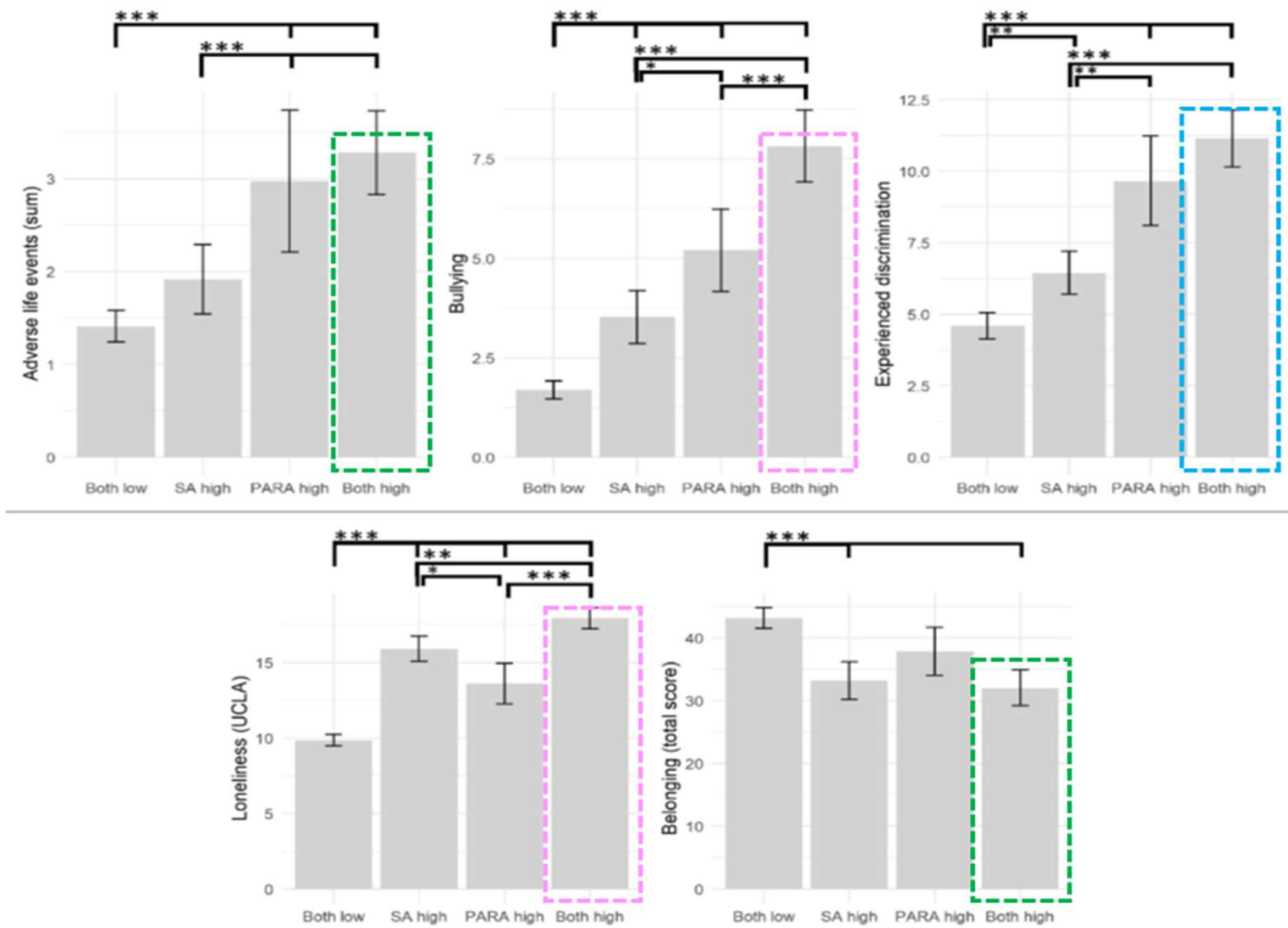


A representative school cohort of 801 adolescents (11–15 y) completed measures of paranoia and a range of affective, cognitive, and social factors.

PARANOIA AND SOCIAL ANXIETY OVERLAP



Kingston, J. L., Schlier, B., Leigh, E., Widyasari, D., & Bentall, R. P. (2024). Social anxiety and paranoid beliefs in adolescents. *JCPP Advances*, e12280.



HOW DOES PARANOIA NEGATIVELY AFFECT TEENS

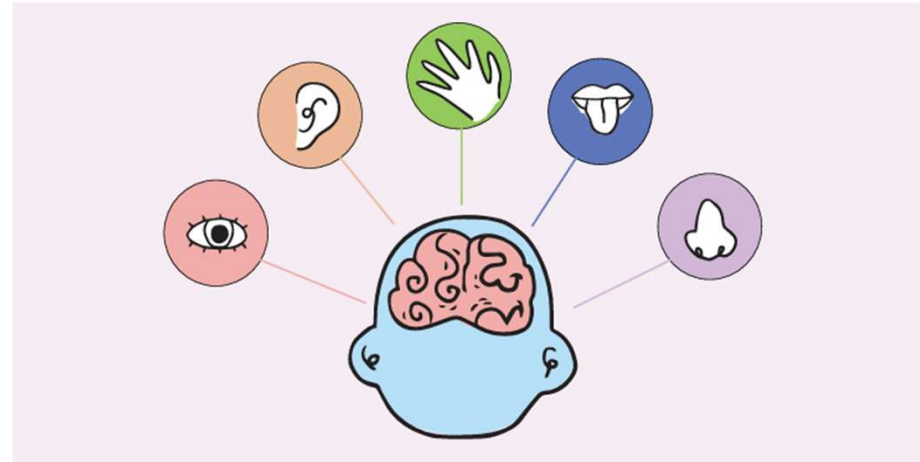
Reduced social
functioning
(i.e., connecting and
building relationships
with others)

Reduced role **functioning**
(i.e., fulfilling school and
work responsibilities) (Fan
et al. 2022).

Poorer psychological
well-being
(i.e., optimism, autonomy,
competency; Bird et al.
2021; Thompson et al.,
2025)

For a minority may be a
risk factor for
development of **mental**
health disorders

THE ROLE OF MENTAL IMAGERY



- Exciting new area in the research that hasn't been investigated before
- Vivid, emotional mental images about young people's fears and suspicions
- Can be distressing and intrusive and worsen paranoid beliefs

Adolescents' Paranoid Mental Images

"walking into school while a group of classmates whispered and laughed. I wasn't sure it was about me, but I felt tense and out of place, so I looked down and walked faster"

"Someone deliberately tackling me in football to hurt me"

"walking into a meeting or classroom, and everyone suddenly goes quiet and gives you cold, judgmental stares"

"My neighbour dragging me by the hair from our garage to the street and leaving me on the ground crying"

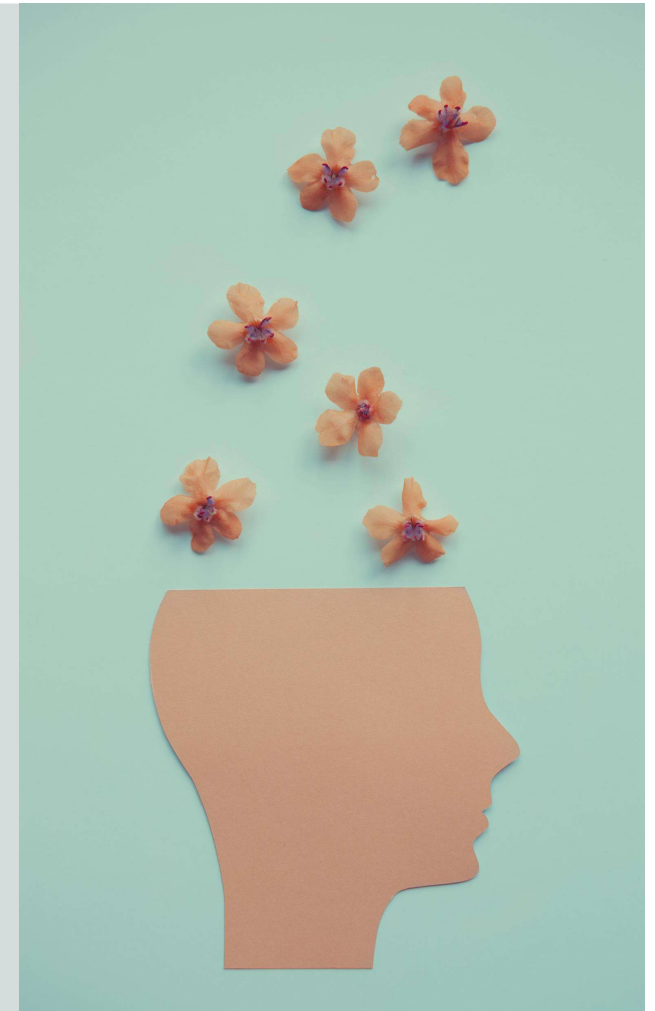
"one of my classmate picking on me while the rest of the class were laughing and calling me weird names"

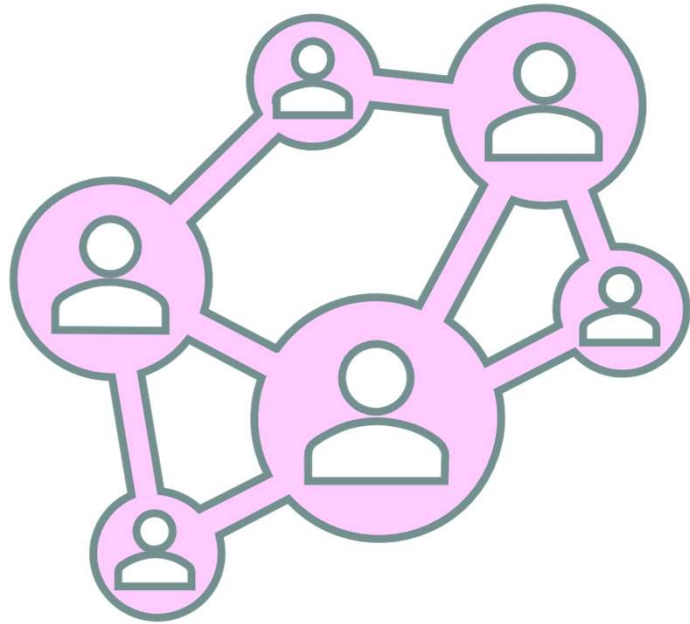
"Image is of Facebook and hurtful comments about me"

N=500 UK teens aged 15-17

GET INVOLVED!

- We are now recruiting teens for a number of upcoming research projects at Royal Holloway
- We are looking to learn more about young people's negative mental images so we can develop ways to help them manage them
- help us to pioneer new interventions to help improve young people's wellbeing





OUR PROJECTS

1. Schools can opt into research running 2025-2027 offering a novel therapy to adolescents with elevated paranoia.
2. We also have a qualitative interview study exploring the role of mental imagery in adolescents' experiences of paranoia

If you are interested in being a host school, please approach me after, or email

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Jessica.kingston@rhul.ac.uk (supervisor)