

# Emotional disorder and absence from school in the British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Surveys

Katie Finning

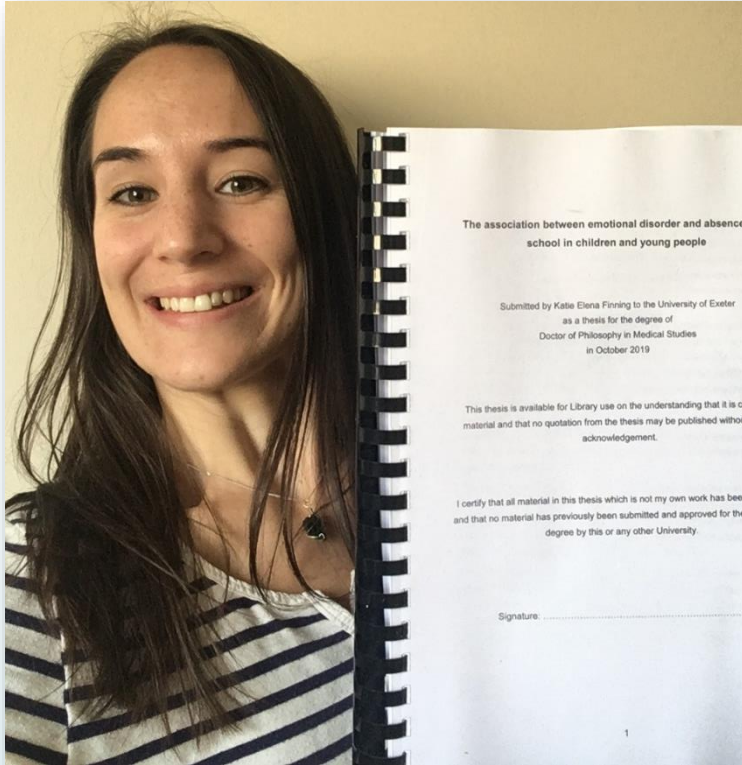
PhD Student, Child Mental Health Research Group

University of Exeter Medical School, UK

[k.finning@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:k.finning@exeter.ac.uk)

Twitter: @katiefinning

# About me



My background:

Psychology/adult mental health research

# Emotional disorders?

- Anxiety & depression
- Diagnosable disorders + emotional symptoms



# Background to this study

- Previous research – systematic review:
  - Depression: overall absence, unauthorised absence, school refusal
  - Anxiety: less clear, possibly overall absence, unauthorised absence, school refusal
- Little research in large, representative samples
- Very few explored authorised absence
- Almost no research with children in UK

# The 2004 British Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey (BCAMHS)

- Population survey of 7,977 5-16 year olds living in Britain (England, Scotland or Wales)
- Sampled via Child Benefit register
- Interviews with children and parents + postal questionnaire to nominated teacher
- Key measures:
  - Anxiety & depressive disorders (DAWBA) (parent + teacher + child)
  - Emotional difficulties (SDQ) (parent + teacher)
  - Days absent (max n=70): authorised & unauthorised (teacher)
  - Demographic characteristics

## Three year follow-up survey in 2007

- 73% of baseline sample completed follow-up (N=5,326)
- Interviews with children and parents + postal questionnaire to nominated teacher
- Identical measures to the baseline survey

## Research questions

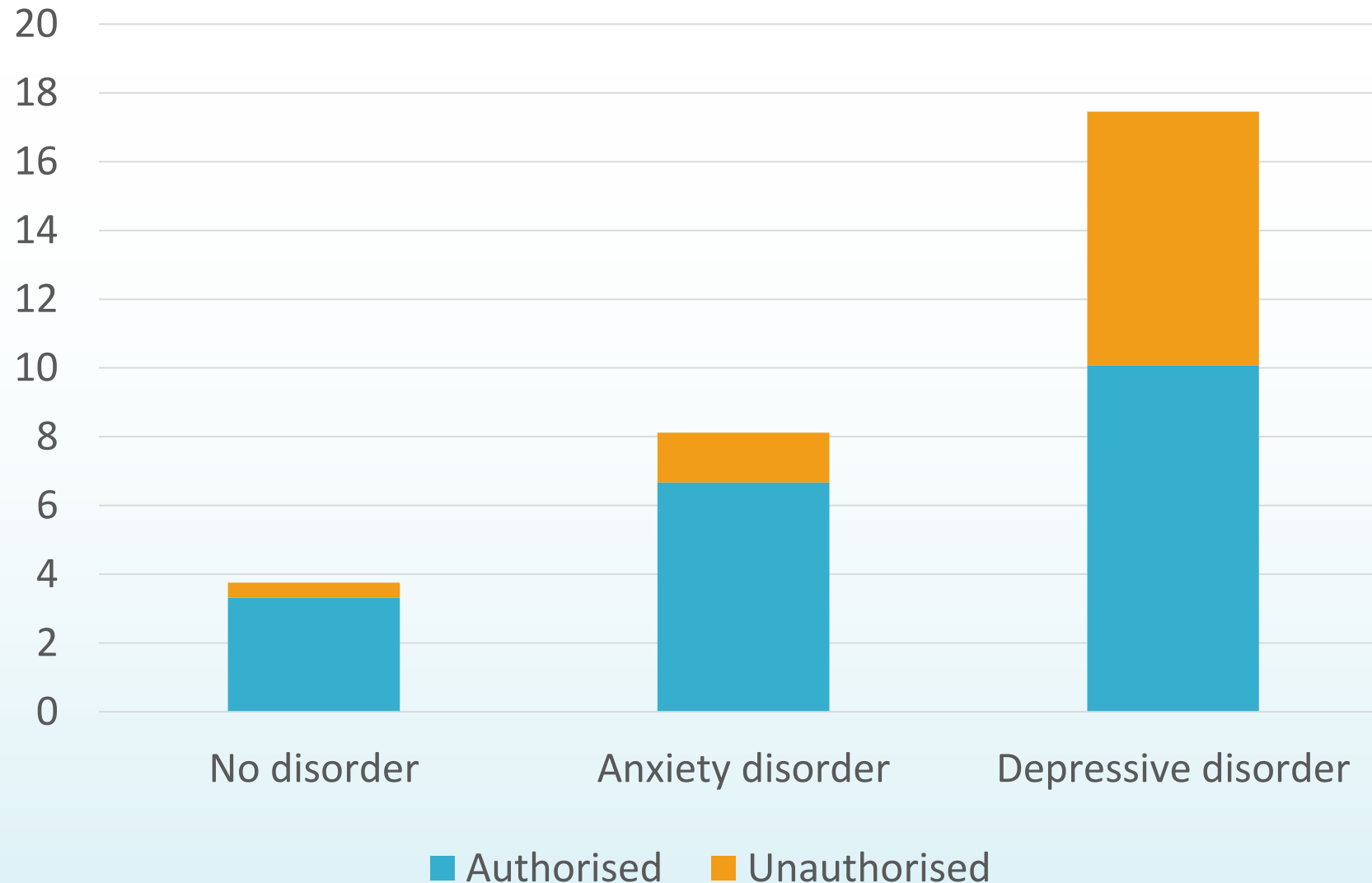
1. Are emotional disorder/emotional difficulties associated with authorised or unauthorised absence in 2004?
2. Do emotional disorder/difficulties in 2004 predict absence in 2007?
3. Does absence in 2004 predict emotional disorder/difficulties in 2007?

## Research questions

- 1. Are emotional disorder/emotional difficulties associated with authorised or unauthorised absence in 2004?**
2. Do emotional disorder/difficulties in 2004 predict absence in 2007?
3. Does absence in 2004 predict emotional disorder/difficulties in 2007?



# Mean number of absences for children with and without emotional disorder in 2004



# Are emotional *disorders* associated with absence in 2004?

- Incident Rate Ratios = ratio of the rate of absence for those with disorder compared to those with no disorder (RR of 1 means no difference)
- All analyses adjusted for confounders (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity...)

	Authorised Absence	Unauthorised Absence
Anxiety	1.61 (1.32 to 1.97) p<0.001	2.23 (1.19 to 4.15) p=0.012
Depression	2.39 (1.63 to 3.50) p<0.001	11.24 (5.40 to 23.39) p<0.001

## Are emotional *difficulties* associated with absence in 2004?

- NB emotional difficulties scores are on a scale from 0 to 10. Rate ratios refer to the increase in the rate of absence *per one point increase* on the SDQ emotional difficulties scale

	Authorised Absence	Unauthorised Absence
Parent-reported emotional difficulties	1.07 (1.05 to 1.09) p<0.001	1.08 (1.00 to 1.15) p=0.048
Teacher-reported emotional difficulties	1.09 (1.07 to 1.12) p=0.008	1.13 (1.06 to 1.22) p=0.001

## Research questions

1. Are emotional disorder/emotional difficulties associated with authorised or unauthorised absence in 2004?
- 2. Do emotional disorder/difficulties in 2004 predict absence in 2007?**
3. Does absence in 2004 predict emotional disorder/difficulties in 2007?

## Does emotional *disorder* in 2004 predict absence in 2007?

- Incident Rate Ratios = ratio of the rate of absence for those with disorder compared to those with no disorder (RR of 1 means no difference)

	Authorised Absence (2007)	Unauthorised Absence (2007)
<b>Anxiety</b>	1.16 (0.85 to 1.57) p=0.35	1.70 (0.87 to 3.34) p=0.12
<b>Depression</b>	1.71 (0.83 to 3.53) p=0.14	<b>6.72 (2.84 to 15.93)</b> <b>p&lt;0.001</b>

## Do emotional *difficulties* in 2004 predict absence in 2007?

- NB emotional difficulties scores are on a scale from 0 to 10. Rate ratios refer to the increase in the rate of absence *per one point increase* on the SDQ emotional difficulties scale

	Authorised Absence (2007)	Unauthorised Absence (2007)
Parent-reported emotional difficulties	1.02 (0.99 to 1.04) p=0.27	1.02 (0.96 to 1.09) p=0.50
Teacher-reported emotional difficulties	1.02 (0.99 to 1.05) p=0.23	<b>1.09 (1.02 to 1.16)</b> <b>p=0.01</b>

## Research questions

1. Are emotional disorder/emotional difficulties associated with authorised or unauthorised absence in 2004?
2. Do emotional disorder/difficulties in 2004 predict absence in 2007?
3. **Does absence in 2004 predict emotional disorder/difficulties in 2007?**

## Does 2004 absence predict emotional *disorder* in 2007?

- Odds Ratios = ratio of the odds of disorder for each *five-day* increase in absence (OR of 1 means no difference)

	Anxiety (2007)	Depression (2007)
<b>Authorised absence</b>	1.07 (0.93 to 1.24) p=0.35	1.13 (0.91 to 1.41) p=0.28
<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	0.98 (0.74 to 1.30) p=0.88	0.94 (0.56 to 1.58) p=0.81





## Does 2004 absence predict emotional *difficulties* in 2007?

- Regression coefficients = increase in emotional difficulties scores for each *five-day* increase in absence (coefficient of 0 means no relationship)

	Parent-reported emotional difficulties (2007)	Teacher-reported emotional difficulties (2007)
Authorised absence	0.08 (0.02 to 0.15) p=0.02	0.12 (0.04 to 0.21) p=0.003
Unauthorised absence	0.12 (-0.02 to 0.26) p=0.09	0.12 (-0.09 to 0.34) p=0.25

## To summarise...

- Strong cross-sectional relationships between all measures of emotional disorder and authorised and unauthorised absence
- Strongest relationship: depression + unauthorised absence
- Depression & teacher-reported emotional difficulties  Higher unauthorised absence 3 years later
- Authorised absence  Higher parent & teacher-reported emotional difficulties 3 years later

# What does all of this mean?

- Emotional disorders (particularly depression) associated with school absence
- Professionals: poor attendance may signify emotional problems
- Emotional disorders especially predictive of unauthorised absence
- Findings highlight potential for emotional disorders to adversely affect education
  - early identification and intervention
- Authorised absence --> higher levels of subsequent emotional difficulties

# Thank you!

[k.finning@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:k.finning@exeter.ac.uk)

Twitter: @katiefinning

With thanks to: Prof Tamsin Ford, Dr Obi Ukoumunne & Dr Darren Moore