



Paranoid beliefs in adolescents

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What is paranoia?

“feeling someone might harm you or someone is out to get you ...for me it was like very paralysing ... like ... I would be quite frozen.... makes me not able to do anything or concentrate on anything”.

“[paranoia] is quite common, more common than people think... people feel shame about it because there is a lot of stigma and there isn't enough support in school” ...

17 and 18 year olds with lived experience of paranoia



Paranoia...



exaggerated fears that others intend to cause you harm

Common in the general population

Experiences range on a continuum from mild mistrust and suspicion to clinically-significant persecutory delusions (Freeman et al. 2018).

	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	

How common are paranoid beliefs in adolescents?

	Adolescents	Adults (Freeman et al., 2019)
General population	N=859, M=7.39 (SD=10.22)	N=7279, M=4.52 (SD=6.74)
MH diagnosis	N=214, M=13.18 (SD=12.72)	N=982, M=8.12 (SD=9.35)

In a UK school-attending adolescent sample (n=1073)

16.9% YP scored ≥ 18 on RGPTS indicating “likely persecutory delusions”.

27.6% scored ≥ 11 , indicating “persecutory ideation”.

33% of “persecutory ideation” sample reported MH diagnosis

34% of “persecutory delusions” sample reported MH diagnosis

Moving to secondary school – school perspective

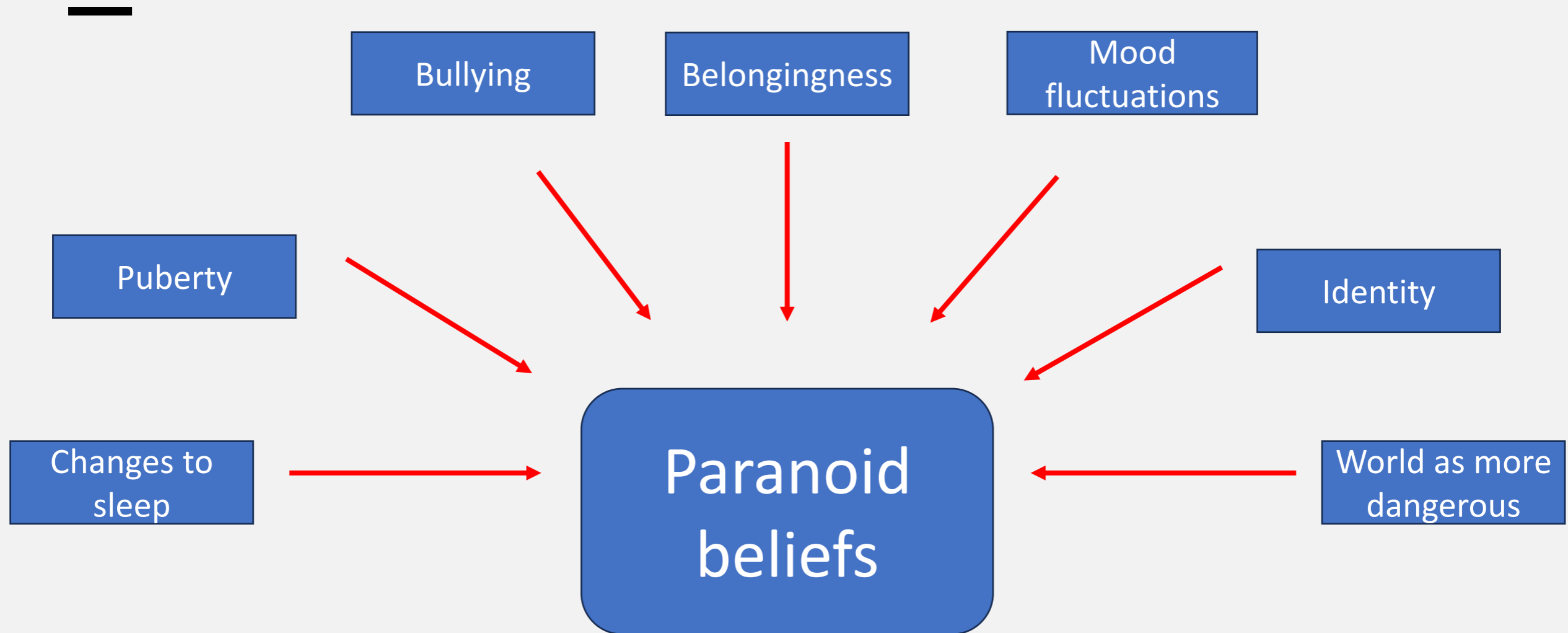
Worried older kids might talk to them, call them names, roll their eyes

Felling unsafe in corridors and toilets

Scared of walking home and people harming them



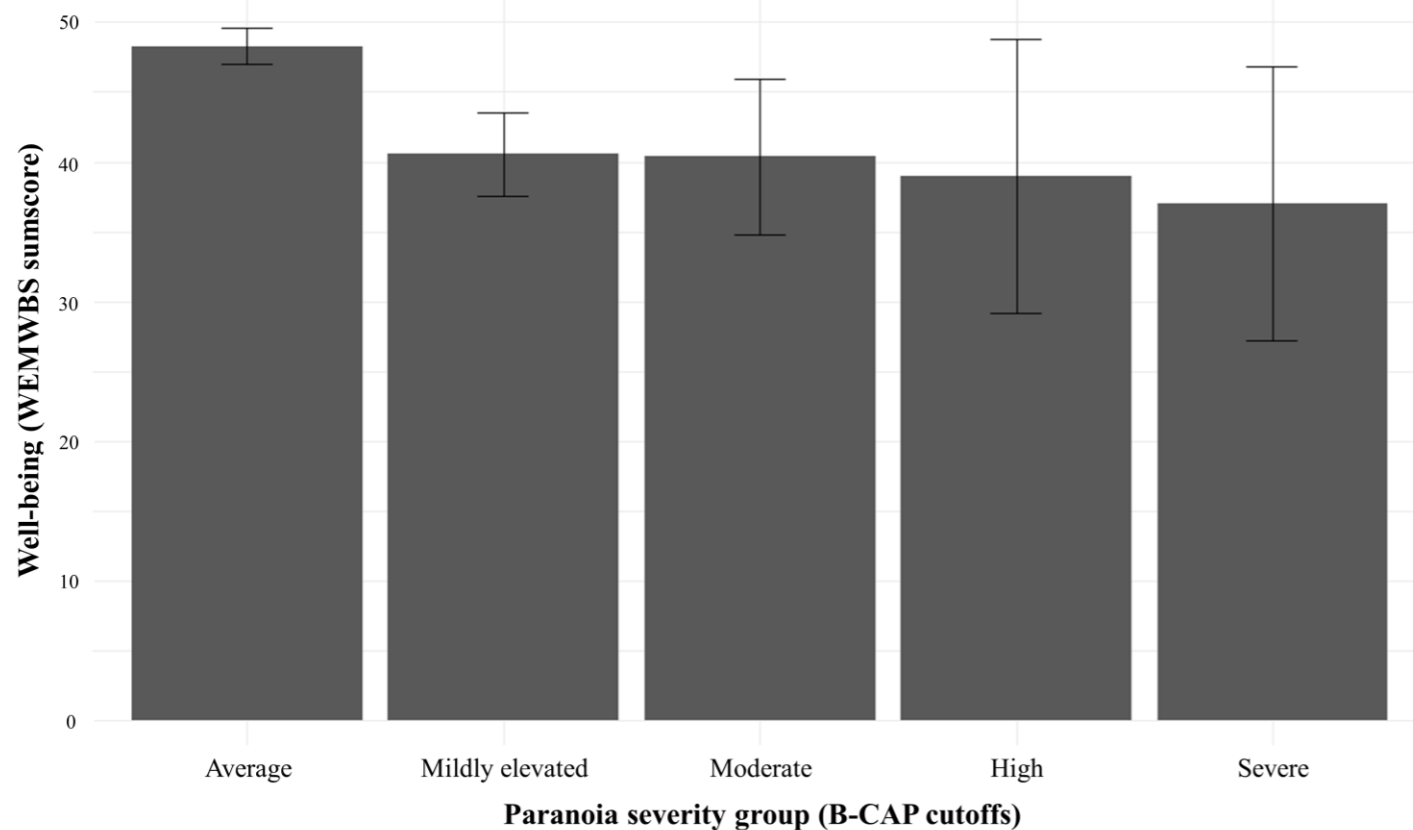
Being an Adolescent



Unique phase of development, characterised by a number of significant social, cognitive, behavioural and neurodevelopmental changes

Paranoia and well-being

Schools project measuring paranoia (IV), well-being (DV), self-esteem, worry and judging oneself (mediators) at BL, 2 and 6-weeks later (14-16 years olds, n=133)

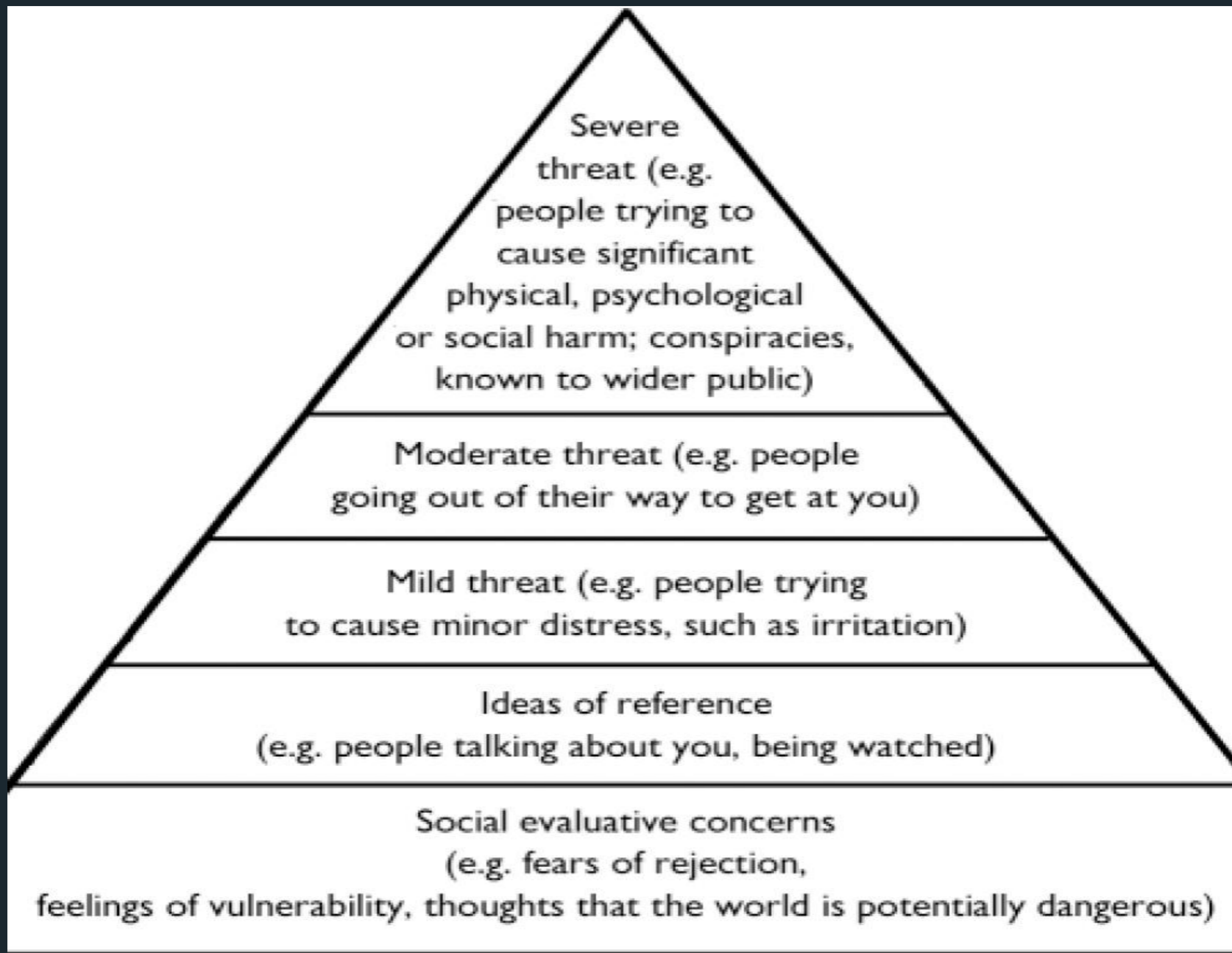


“average” - WB scores comparable to other adolescent and adult groups (M=48.29, SD=9.86, Med=49).

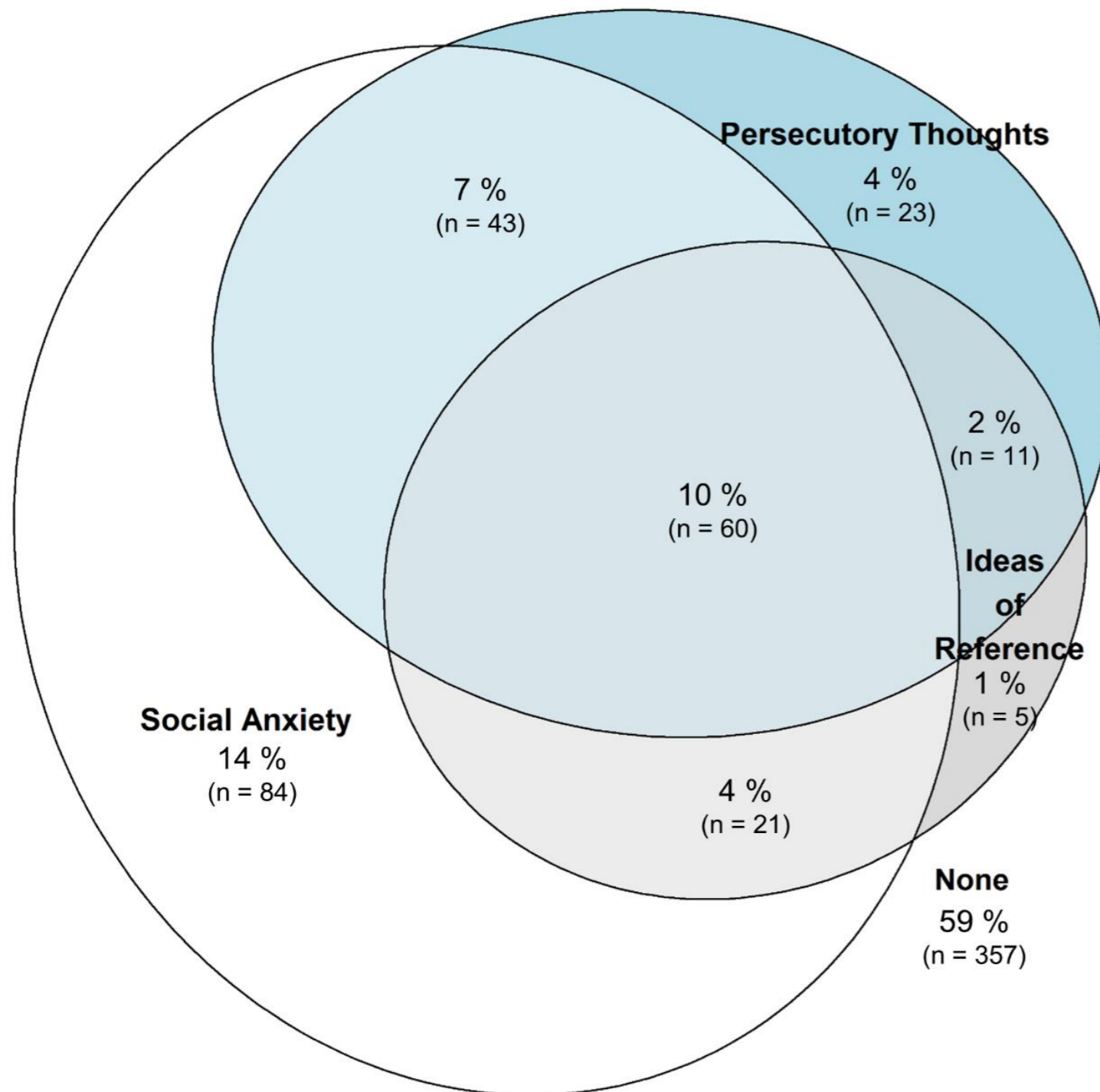
“mildly elevated” to “severe”, WB significantly lower (M= 40.06, SD=9.04, Med=41; $t = 5.45, p < 0.001$)

Paranoia predicted reductions in WB overtime

paranoia reduced WB via its impact on the young people’s self-esteem



Social anxiety and paranoia in adolescents



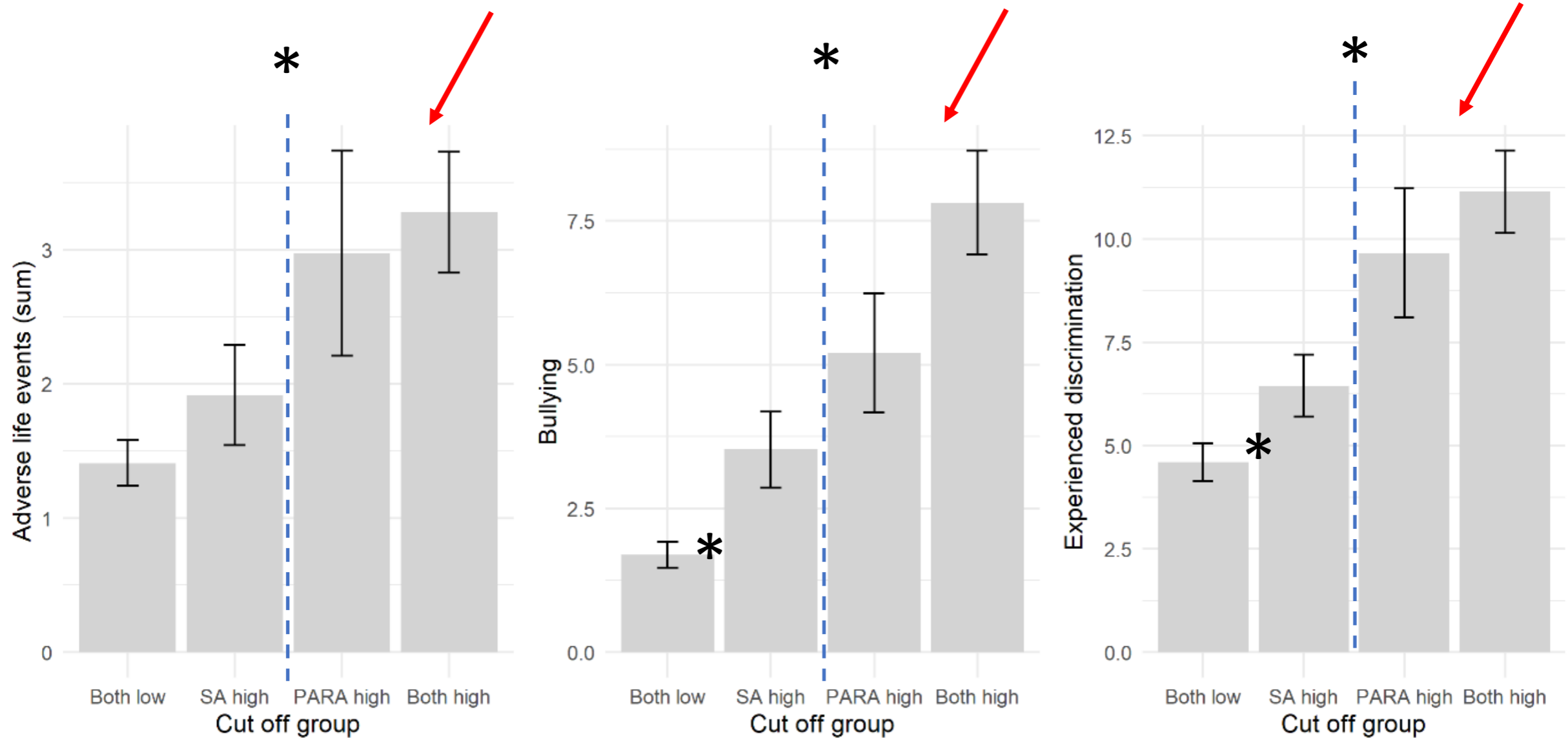
N=604 GP adolescents

Largest subgroup - elevated social anxiety and paranoia (21%, n=124)

Next, high social anxiety only (14%, n=84)

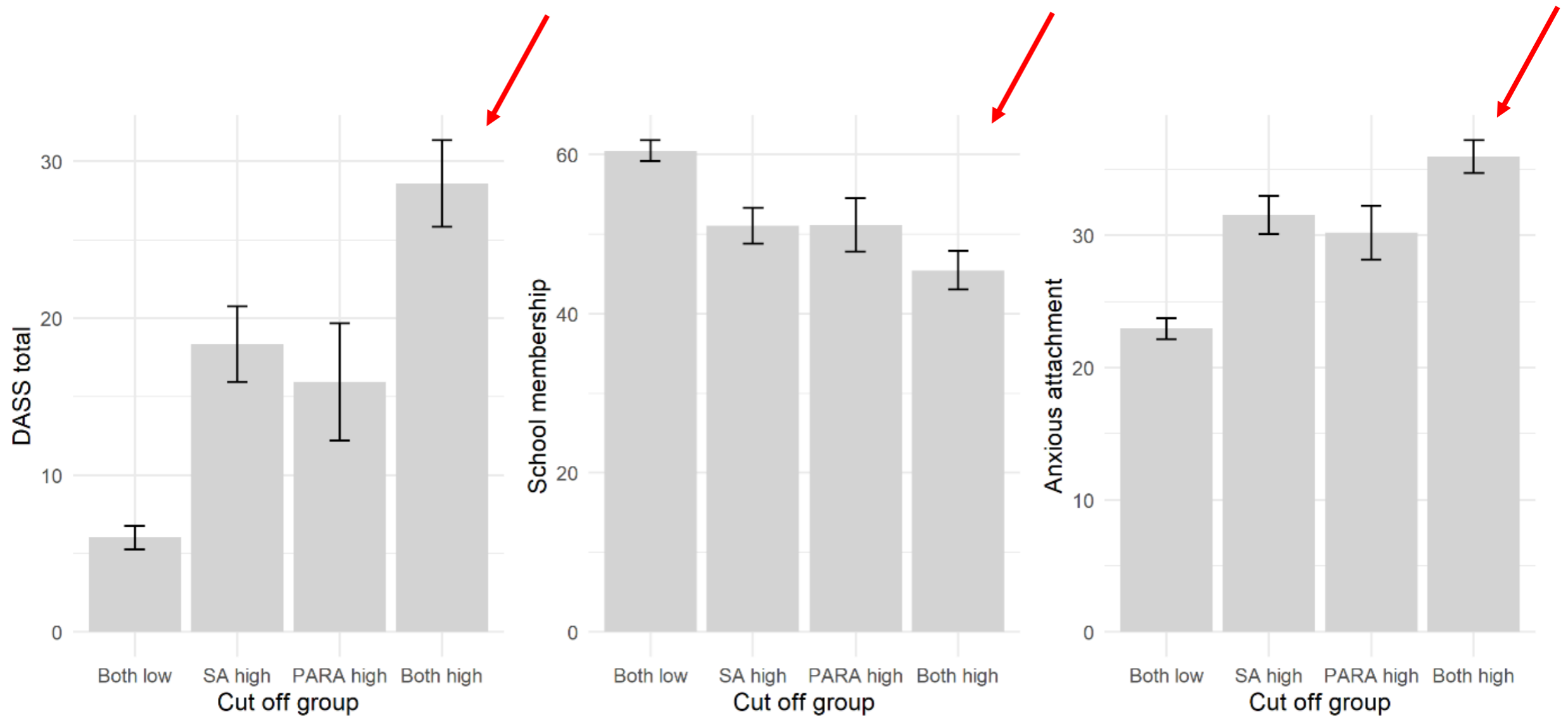
Participants with only high Ideas of reference and/or ideas of persecution were considerably less prevalent (6%, n=39)

Psychosocial risk: ALE, Bullying, discrimination



For this cluster, those with paranoia with or with SA had significantly higher scores

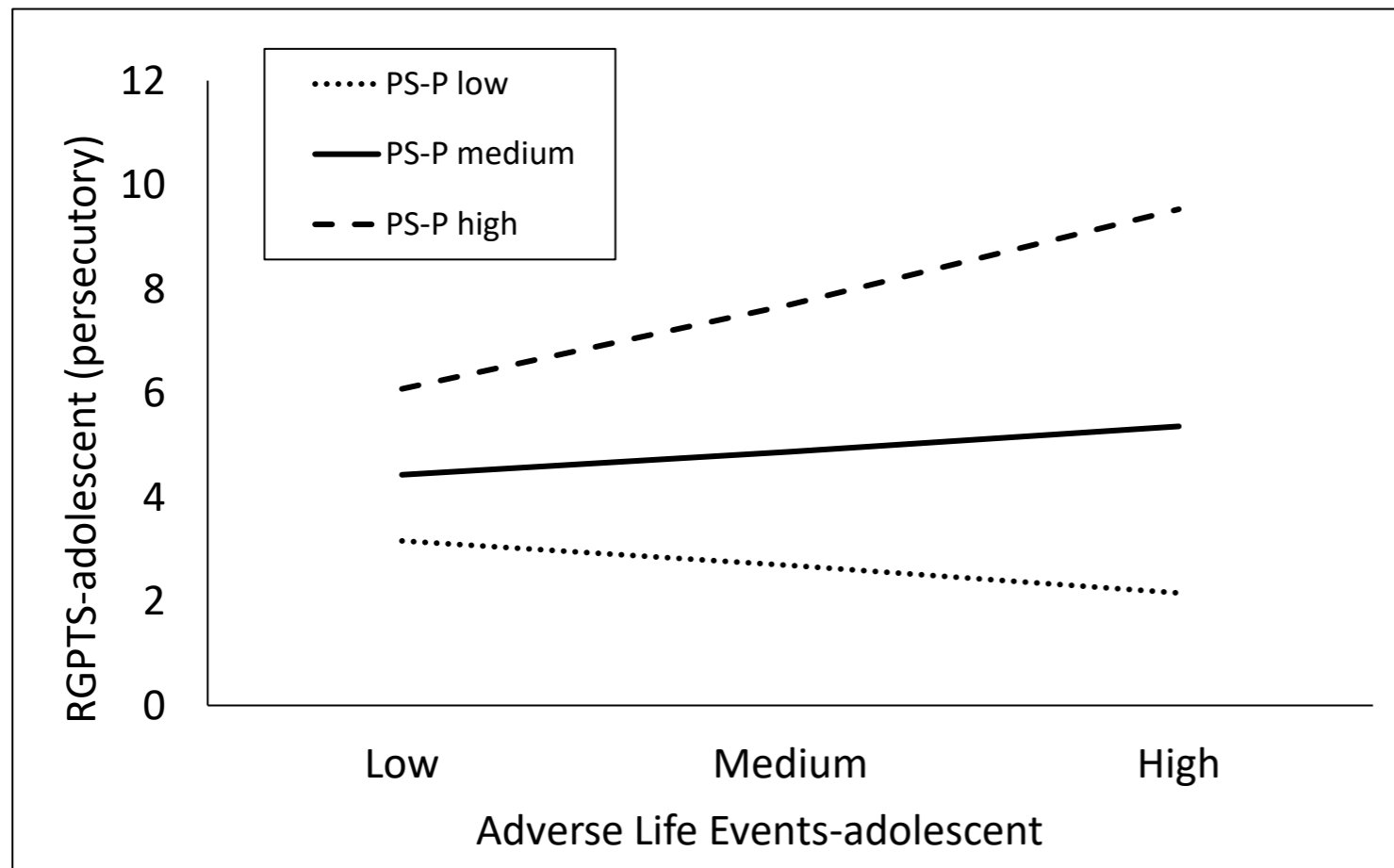
Distress, school membership, anxious attachment



Both-low group showed most favourable mean scores, both-high group showing the least favourable mean scores

Family context

- N=142 adolescent and parent dyads
- ALE and bullying were significantly associated with paranoia ($r=.21$ & $r=.61$)
- Adolescent paranoid beliefs were significantly associated with parental stress ($r=.32$)



Parental stress sig. modified the ALEs- \rightarrow paranoia pathway

$R = .395$, $R^2 = .156$, $F = 4.97$, $p = .003$

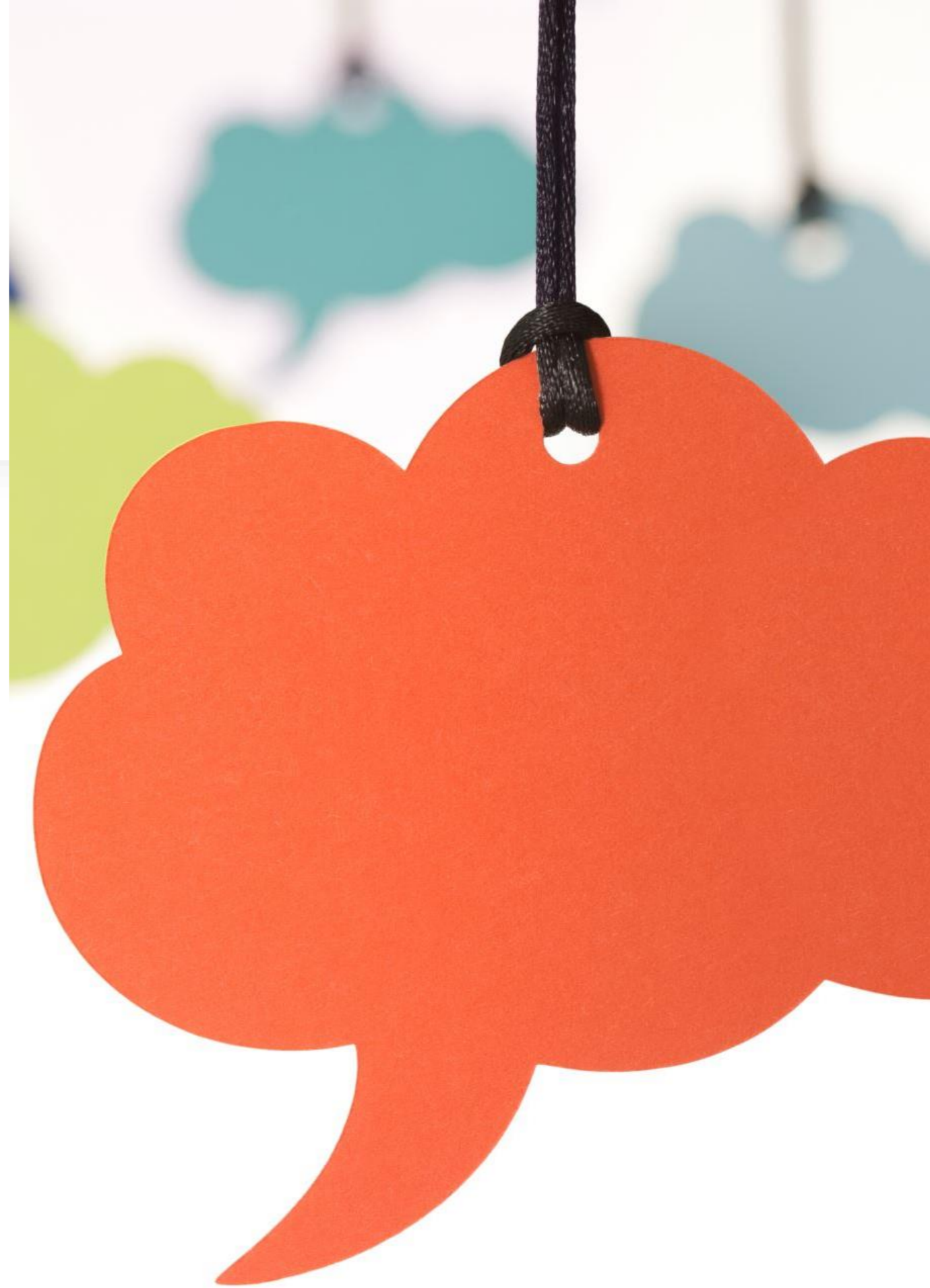
Interaction effect $B = .095$, $SE = .046$, $t = 2.07$, $p = .04$



- When parents reported low and moderate levels of parenting stress (i.e., high and moderate levels of parental warmth), exposure to ALEs was not related to paranoid beliefs in the adolescent.
- However, when parents reported high levels of parenting stress and low levels of warmth, exposure to ALEs was strongly associated with paranoid beliefs in the adolescent.

Summary

- Feeling suspicious, mistrusting and paranoid in adolescents is common
- Teenagers do not tend to talk to adults about it
- Talking to teenagers with paranoia suggests it can feel stigmatised and shameful
- For a minority of teenagers, it can escalate into serious and persisting beliefs that have lifelong implications





School projects

- Tracking paranoid beliefs in young people to better understand why it gets worse for some young people and, in particular, the factors that trigger escalation into psychosis
- Treatment of paranoia beliefs via schools-based intervention

Thanks for listening

Questions?!

