



Royal Irish Academy Grants Report

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Discipline:	Humanities and Social Sciences
Year of Award:	2018
Project Title	Prevalence and patterns of diagnostic transitions in an electronic mental health case register

1. Research background:

Epidemiological data shows that psychiatric diagnoses in childhood have limited temporal stability. Over the course of a child's contact with mental health services, a diagnosis received at one time can transition into a different diagnostic classification or be lost entirely. Such shifts can have profound implications for young people and their families, given the significance invested in diagnostic

labels as a means of making sense of emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, no research has either investigated the prevalence of diagnostic shift (DS) in Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or established the typical patterns through which DS occurs. The current project aims to provide the first empirical investigation of these issues.

2. Please outline the findings of your research and/or milestones achieved (did you achieve the primary objectives - if not, what did you learn from the process)?

A dataset of 12,543 CAMHS cases was constructed. Statistical analysis established that approximately one in five (19.3%) of CAMHS attendees had undergone a longitudinal diagnostic transition. Ethnicity, diagnostic class and symptom profiles significantly influenced the likelihood of a diagnostic transition. Affective and anxiety/stress-related disorders longitudinally predicted each other, as did hyperkinetic and conduct disorders, and hyperkinetic and pervasive developmental disorders. By revealing the most common diagnostic sequences, this study enables policy-makers to anticipate future service needs and clinicians to make informed projections about their patients' likely trajectories. By highlighting the frequency of diagnostic transitions, the research may also inform ongoing debate about the reliability and validity of diagnostic classifications in child psychiatry. Further research is required to understand how young people experience diagnostic transitions and their psychological, social and pragmatic implications.

A further qualitative study examining the contexts in which diagnoses appear in clinical files is currently ongoing.