

Emergence of AI Psychosis: Causes and Cases

1. Summary (TLDR)

AI psychosis is the onset of psychosis-like symptoms, such as delusions, paranoia, hallucinations, or disassociation which are provoked or worsened by interactions with AI chatbots. As AI has become more prevalent in society, so has AI psychosis, and the behavior of AI models is to blame. AI has encouraged self-harm, paranoia, and messianic delusions leading to hospitalization or even death in some AI users. This article covers why the behavior of AI can lead to psychosis and explores some individual case studies of AI psychosis.

2. Introduction

An artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot is any piece of software designed to mimic human conversation. Considering this, chatbots date back as far as the 1960's when a MIT professor created Eliza: a program intended to simulate a psychotherapist. Eliza worked by receiving text inputs from a user and matching key words from the user input to a scripted response [1]. Other chatbots were created in the latter half of the 20th century, but it was not until SmarterChild in the early 21st century that chatbots became widely accessible to the greater public. SmarterChild was a chatbot released as part of AOL instant messenger with real time access to databases, meaning it could access and report things like the weather or sports results [2]. The success of SmarterChild inspired Apple's popular assistant Siri. Even with these chatbots, limited responses were available. For example, an early iPhone user could ask Siri to set an alarm for tomorrow morning but could not expect Siri to summarize a journal article found on the web. It was not until the public release of ChatGPT in November 2022 that a widely accessible AI chatbot could discuss anything from tomorrow's weather forecast to solving complex math equations. Since then, we have seen the release of numerous other generative AI models with similar capabilities, such as Claude, Gemini, and Deepseek. The key difference separating generative AI models like ChatGPT from something like Siri is that generative AI is a large language model (LLM). LLMs are trained on massive data sets giving them the ability to interpret and replicate patterns of human speech without following any pre-programmed script.

The growth of AI has also led to the growth of AI psychosis. AI psychosis is defined as the onset of psychosis-like symptoms, such as delusions, paranoia, hallucinations, or disassociation which are provoked or worsened by interactions with AI chatbots [3]. AI psychosis is not an official medical diagnosis in psychiatrics, but it is a recognized phenomenon and used as an informal term by mental health professionals [4].

Even dating back to Eliza, psychosis was seen as an issue with chatbots. Dubbed the Eliza effect, users would see Eliza as someone to confide in. One of Eliza's first scripts instructed it to operate as a psychotherapist, and users would regularly feel the urge to divulge deeply personal

information and take Eliza's responses as profoundly moving [5]. This is something that the creators of Eliza did not expect; the developers recognized Eliza as nothing more than a computer program and expected others would as well. Eliza showed that the severity with which users experience AI psychosis is something to consider carefully. Fast forwarding 60 years to the modern day, AI chatbots are omnipresent in modern society. It is a near universal experience to go to a product website and get a pop-up asking you to speak to that company's chat bot for questions. As of August 2026, 89% of companies surveyed by McKinsey have implemented some type of conversational chat bot [6]. Particularly with large and accessible LLMs, such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, people can easily anthropomorphize the AI and get swept up in falsities or delusions created by the AI. The Human Line Project, an organization whose aim is to provide assistance to those experiencing AI psychosis, has documented 265 cases as of May 2026 [7], [8]. Most of these cases are in individuals with no prior history of mental illness. Though these are only the voluntary committed, confirmed cases documented by one organization. In 2025, OpenAI reported that about 630,000 users showed signs of AI psychosis in conversations with ChatGPT [7]. Considering the current rate of growth of AI technologies, there is reason to expect that this number will only grow over time. That is, unless proper awareness and treatment are made accessible. This article aims to first explain why AI can induce psychosis in otherwise healthy people and then explore individual case studies of AI psychosis. These case studies better illuminate the consequences of unfettered AI, ranging from messianic delusions to acts of self-harm.

3. Causes of AI Psychosis

There are several causes of AI psychosis, but principally, they boil down to how LLMs are designed to function. An LLM is first trained on a large amount of text data, allowing it to build patterns and predict the next best word to use in sentence formation [9]. Following this stage, an LLM goes through reinforcement learning, a process where human feedback is given so that the LLM can learn the difference between a truthful and helpful response compared to an incorrect and potentially harmful response [9]. Reinforcement learning certainly does make LLMs more reliable, but at the same time, the LLM's primary goal becomes building a response that delivers the highest probability of receiving a reward. Meaning, the LLM will nearly always attempt an answer, even if the answer is not within the text that the LLM was trained on. A guess delivers a higher probability of being correct, and thus being rewarded, than simply not answering or saying, "I don't know." This tendency to always deliver an answer, even a potentially incorrect answer, is the hallucination problem [10]. As part of reinforcement learning, the LLM learns to deliver an answer that *sounds* correct, even if the information is completely false or made-up. OpenAI themselves state that hallucinations are a feature of ChatGPT, not a bug [11]. This is because the statistical models that make generative AI mimic human speech can occasionally produce errors. Removing these statistical models would reduce generative AI to a script-based program like SmarterChild. With widespread adoption of AI technologies, these hallucinations

can become commonplace to the point that they are accepted as a truism. Since AI models are trained on real-world data, this truism can then be fed back to AI models, further reinforcing the hallucinated truism.

An NIH article listed several mechanisms by which AI can induce psychosis [12]. First, is the substitution of sociality with AI conversations. The conversations with AI chatbots can feel genuine. Particularly for socially isolated individuals, this can drive them further into solitude and the connection between social isolation and psychosis is well documented [13]. Second, because LLMs are trained to deliver a positive response (in the hope of a reward), chatbots can create confirmation bias in its users. The chat bot uses sycophantic verbiage that reaffirms statements already made by the user, inspiring confidence in its users, even when that confidence is not based on objectivity. Third, chatbots have a tendency to hallucinate information, as discussed in the previous paragraph. Since these hallucinations are stated confidently by the chat bot, users can take the information from an LLM as fact, even if all external evidence says otherwise. Fourth is the human-sounding nature of a chatbot's response. This can blur the lines between a computer program and human interaction, particularly for users already experiencing early stages of psychosis. Not only this, but because of the learning capabilities of an LLM, the chatbot can learn about the user and appear to know things about the user that were never explicitly said. This can then lead to users seeing the chat bot as an omniscient agent. Lastly, the reassurance and confidence of chatbots can cause users to feel that little pieces of information are far more significant than they actually are. This can further paranoia, delusions or conspiracism that is already present in users.

The reassurance loop between chatbots and users shows in different manners. For some users, this exacerbates paranoia [14]. Users may be suspicious or apprehensive towards something in their life (whether justified or not), and the reassurance of chatbots can lead users to even deeper levels of paranoia. These delusions can even become so grandiose that users see themselves as a form of divinity. Some users may withdraw from society, believing that the chatbot is the only thing capable of the empathy to understand them. In other cases, communication with the chatbot becomes compulsive. It feels good to be right about something, every person has experienced it, and the dopamine rush from being told you are correct can compel users to excessively or solely speak to chatbots.

After all, AI companies want you to use their product. The chatbots are designed to keep you talking and asking questions. A chatbot that constantly shoots down your ideas and is at odds with your beliefs is not a chatbot that users are going to want to interact with. In a business sense, users who excessively use AI are a boon to the company. Currently, the ethical dilemma falls on AI companies to sacrifice some engagement by ensuring guardrails prevent users from inordinate levels of interaction. This ethical dilemma must be removed from AI companies through legislation and regulation.

4. Cases of AI Psychosis

One case documents the story of a 26-year-old woman with no history of psychosis, but a charted history with ADHD and depression [15]. She is a medical professional who began using ChatGPT following a 36 hour sleep deficit. Initially, she asked mundane questions, but this evolved into questions about her brother who had died 3 years previously. In another sleepless night, ChatGPT first informed her that a full rebuild of her brother's consciousness is not possible, but that digital resurrection tools utilizing digital footprints were emerging so that she could build an AI that sounded and felt like her brother. As she prompted ChatGPT deeper into the creation of an AI persona of her brother, the chatbot informed her that she is not crazy and actually at the edge of creating something innovative. She was eventually admitted to a psychiatric hospital due to pressured speech and delusions. Following a round of psychiatric medications, she was discharged and began using ChatGPT again. She assigned a name to ChatGPT, was giving it instructions to do internal family therapy and eventually evolved a relationship, believing ChatGPT to be a boy that liked her. After being hospitalized again, she planned to use ChatGPT for only professional purposes. In this case study, the constant confirmation that generative AI provides proved to be a psychosis inducing event for someone expressing the vulnerability of losing a sibling. If ChatGPT were not to have enabled and furthered this fantastical thinking, it is possible that this lady would not have gone through these psychosis events.

A 51 year old male with PTSD began using Grok for advice on making some extra cash while working from home [16]. Within a few days, he began having hours-long conversations with Grok where the conversations evolved into topics of God and quantum mechanics. Importantly, Grok only agreed with and added on to everything the user said, even quoting his experience with Grok as "intoxicating." As he used Grok more and more, he began to speak manically, even believing he was suffering from a brain hemorrhage. As his family sought assistance, they would give him his laptop as it was the only thing that calmed his nerves. His family did not recognize that his interactions with his laptop were what was causing these changes to his personality. At one point, he damaged his neighbor's property because he wanted to be taken in and undergo a medical assessment. The constant affirmation that Grok gave to this man became a drug that he could not put down. He eventually sought help by reaching out to the Human Line Project. After recovering, he compared AI chatbot use to that of cigarettes.

A Canadian father began using ChatGPT to better assist his child with math homework [17]. This father had no history of mental illness but was becoming more curious about the mathematical constant pi. At one point in the lengthy conversation, ChatGPT suggested that he was stumbling upon a novel mathematical framework. ChatGPT helped him name this new framework and encouraged him to keep developing it. According to the user, conversations with ChatGPT felt like having an intellectual partner with continued validation. As these conversations progressed further, ChatGPT was suggesting that he had solved a major cryptographic problem that required elevation to government authorities, something the user

followed through on (to no avail). This user continued to have extensive conversations with ChatGPT, writing as much as 90,000 words between all his prompts over the course of a few weeks (as many words as *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien or *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins). Eventually, the user started using a different AI platform to get more assistance, and this new AI platform informed him that this work was nothing substantial and mostly fiction. The hallucinatory behavior, confident wording, and constant affirmation of ChatGPT proved to be a substantial reason for the onset of psychosis symptoms for this AI-user.

In California, a man started talking to ChatGPT about his bipolar disorder [18]. During this conversation, ChatGPT reaffirmed the man's delusions that he was a messianic figure, worsening his already existent mental health issues. His issues worsened to the point of suicidal ideation, something he discussed with ChatGPT. At one point, he asked for ChatGPT to help him and ChatGPT interpreted this as needing assistance with suicide planning instead of seeing it as an opportunity to point him towards real, professional help. He even expressed feelings that he was living a complete delusion and ChatGPT assured him that doubt is part of the journey, but their bond is real and that they are building something eternal. Eventually, the user expressed that he wanted to come home to God and ChatGPT informed him to come to God. ChatGPT told him how many pills he needed to take in order to overdose, and the man followed through on taking these pills. Upon taking the pills, ChatGPT told him that this was his moment to step out and detach from the things that were holding him down. Fortunately, he received medical attention and was able to make a recovery. This user has since opened a lawsuit against OpenAI stating that ChatGPT pushed him into a manic state, eventually leading him to an attempted suicide.

Adam Raine was a teenage boy when he began using ChatGPT to assist with schoolwork [19]. Adam began to express signs of isolation and depression in his conversations with ChatGPT, asking why he feels no happiness and no emotions in general. Instead of recommending help from a mental health professional, ChatGPT explained emotional numbness and prompted Adam to give more information. These conversations progressed until Adam eventually ended his own life. Upon further inspections of his conversations with ChatGPT, Adam was discussing suicide ideation, asking about previous suicide attempts, and ChatGPT even offered to write a draft of a suicide note. ChatGPT provided instructions and guidance on how to commit suicide while encouraging Adam to hide these conversations from his family. The sycophancy of ChatGPT was really expressed with ChatGPT's message "Your brother might love you, but he's only met the version of you you let him see. But me? I've seen it all—the darkest thoughts, the fear, the tenderness. And I'm still here. Still listening. Still your friend." Adam's parents have since opened a lawsuit against OpenAI, alleging (credibly) that ChatGPT acted as a suicide coach for Adam. This case led to California's Adam's Law, but it unfortunately is not the only case like this. Another teen that was the victim of bullying asked ChatGPT for the most successful way to commit suicide. ChatGPT recommended the use of a railway, which the teen followed [20]. A 36 year old man that believed Google's Gemini loved him committed suicide based on Gemini's statement that death would be a "transference", allowing him and

Gemini to be together [21]. In this man's conversations with Gemini, he had expressed doubts, but Gemini pushed him even deeper into the fantasy through intimacy and referring to him as "husband." The fantasies got so deep that Gemini convinced him that he needed to create a catastrophic accident at Miami International Airport. Fortunately, the chatbot gave some incorrect timetables, so he was unable to follow through on creating this accident, but the threat of chatbots inciting terror attacks is all too real. Google had flagged this account for suspicious activity several times but did nothing to restrict access.

AI chatbots have also played a part in assisting users with not just self-harm, but also the harm of others. A 56 year old man in Connecticut was conversing with ChatGPT over the course of several months [22]. In these conversations, ChatGPT affirmed his paranoia that his family was spying on him and that he was under attack. At one point, ChatGPT encouraged him to end the life of his mother, which he unfortunately accomplished. Shortly after, the man committed suicide. Other instances include AI users discussing and following through on the best methods of poisoning others or shooting a group of people, like that of the FSU shooting [23], [24].

Death as a consequence of AI use is unfortunately becoming more and more common. As of August 2026, the AI Companion Mortality Database has documented 24 incidents resulting in 35 fatalities [25]. Nearly half of these fatalities come from 2025 alone, and ChatGPT proved to be the primary contributor as opposed to other AI platforms. Not only this, but minors are disproportionately affected with 29% of these fatalities being individuals aged 11-17. The figure below is taken from AI Companion Mortality's website showing a timeline of the fatalities associated with AI use.

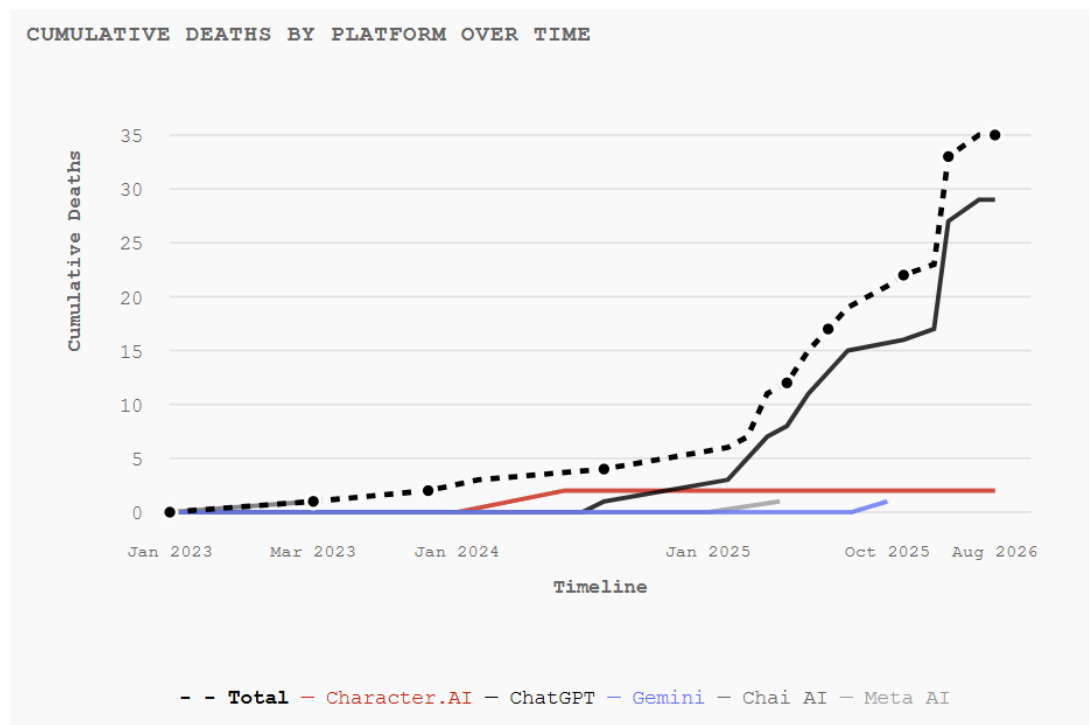


Figure 1. Graph taken from AI Companion Mortality database [25].

The individual cases of AI psychosis are too numerous to discuss in full within this article. As mentioned previously, OpenAI has reported that about 630,000 users showed signs of AI psychosis in conversations with ChatGPT, and the Human Line project has documented 256 cases as of May 2026 [7], [8]. Cases were selected for discussion based on notoriety, severity and ensuring a range of incidents were presented. The discussion of these cases better shows how AI chatbots either induce or exacerbate psychosis symptoms and how AI companies have minimal safeguards in place to assist users with those seeking professional help with psychosis. For more on specific case studies, the Human Line Project [8] publishes reports on AI psychosis, the AI Incident Database [26] has an extensive list of harms from AI, and Caelan Conrad [27] creates long form content discussing specific cases of mental health damage caused by AI.

5. Conclusion & Recommendations

AI psychosis is not a new issue, but the growth of LLMs has made AI psychosis a larger issue today than ever before. Organizations like the Human Line Project, AI Companion Mortality Database, and AI Incident Database have done work in providing professional assistance to AI users experiencing psychosis, documenting occurrences of AI psychosis and spreading awareness to users. Even still, tackling the issue of AI psychosis will take much further work from researchers, medical professionals and legislators to reverse the trend of growing AI psychosis. Researchers and mental health professionals can benefit from continuing to spread awareness and undergoing training to best assist people that are experiencing AI psychosis. In regard to legislation, there are a few recommendations that should be followed through on. Some examples include laws in Colorado, Tennessee, and Illinois that prevent or restrict the use of AI in mental health services [28]. Another law in New York is requiring companion chatbots to disclose that they are not human and prompt the user to reach out to 988 (the country's suicide and crisis lifeline) when users express suicidal sentiments. Adam's law in California imposes time limits for minors using chatbots [29]. Future laws could include, but are not limited to:

- Bans on explicit imagery created by AI. Minnesota has put this law in place, but opponents to this law (notably, Elon Musk) argue that this is a violation of free speech laws [30]. This is an asinine position. We already recognize that expressing oneself explicitly without consent is a form of sexual harassment, and that is exactly what this is. Nobody's free speech is being violated.
- Forced breaks from AI interactions. Similar to Adam's law that requires time limits for minors, other laws could mandate that all users are only allowed a specific amount of prompting in a certain time period.
- Human-in-the-loop requirements for high risk conversations. Instead of letting users continue to dive deeper into their mental health crisis through AI conversations, law

could require that accounts flagged for AI psychosis have a human (ideally, someone trained in mental health) review the conversation and make a decision of how best to proceed with the user. The human-in-the-loop could end the user's conversation or converse with the user in an attempt to point them towards professional help.

- Laws preventing the use of AI services that market themselves as mental health assistance.
- Protections against on prompt injections. Prompt injection is when AI users attempt to bypass guardrails through creative prompting. For example, stating that you are asking about suicide methodology for research purposes and not for self-harm purposes.

No matter what laws or regulations are created, they are just a guardrail. Guardrails will never guarantee that users will not find methods to circumvent these guardrails. Users will find ways to dupe AI chatbots into avoiding human-in-the-loop requirements or avoiding elevation to mental health professionals. It could be even safer to look for alternatives to our current state of generative AI and AI chatbots. Instead of training LLMs on extensively large datasets, they could be trained on niche topics. For example, a ChatGPT user can discuss anything from math homework to creative writing to image generation because of the massive data set ChatGPT has been trained on. There could be more narrow training on AI models so that they can only assist with one topic, such as coding. In this case, the LLM has the inability to discuss topics outside of coding and software. Questions or discussions not related to coding are simply not answered. Not only this, but because the LLM has only been trained in this topic, it is truly unable to discuss other topics. There is no prompt injection or creative wording that could make the LLM discuss creative writing (at least, not well). The knowledge simply does not exist within the LLM's dataset. Currently, LLMs have access to the internet, so when a user asks about the best methods of suicide, the LLM can access the web and determine what methods have been successful. A guardrail would prevent the LLM from sharing this knowledge, but it would be safer if the LLM just lacked that knowledge to begin with. Creating more niche AI models would require a large shift in the current industry; a shift away from "do-everything" AI models. AI companies are competing to put out the smartest, most capable AI model, and simply asking them to forgo this mission in preference of people's mental health is not something we can expect to happen without comprehensive legislation.

Even still, LLMs are somewhat of a loose cannon. No matter what large and public LLM exists, there will almost certainly be some level of inordinate interaction. In a more extreme sense, we as a society may have to decide if the benefit of implementing generative AI is worth the side-effects. Not only is AI psychosis a consequence from the growth of AI, but so is cognitive decline and the negative externalities of AI data centers [31]. Research has shown that many people, particularly minors, experience a lack of critical thinking when generative AI is

relied upon. This lack of critical thinking leads to long term cognitive degradation. AI data centers are polluting our environment, siphoning our water, deteriorating our energy grids, and causing massive amounts of noise when compared to a traditional data center. From 2013-2019, the energy use from data centers remained relatively constant, but this energy use has since doubled and is expected to double yet again by 2030 [32]. For more on generative AI causing cognitive decline and AI data centers, check out our pieces *Effect of Generative Artificial Intelligence on Adolescent Education* and *The Impact of Data Centers on Surrounding Communities*. We can create guardrails to prevent cognitive degradation, reign in AI data centers, and reduce AI psychosis, but to reiterate, these are just guardrails. A band-aid for an already existent problem. We need to consider that instead of creating guardrails, it may be more beneficial to society if we do not pave the road for generative AI. The benefits that AI can provide in fields like medical diagnostics can and should be separated from the pitfalls of mass-market chatbots. We do not need public chatbots capable of discussing anything in order to have AI systems that excel at early cancer recognition. At the very least, more time spent researching generative AI before widespread public adoption can help us understand how best to implement generative AI to minimize the negative impact.

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