

Women, poor, uninsured face higher risk of psychological distress: CDC

28 May 2015, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter



Better access to mental health care is needed, expert says.

(HealthDay)—Women, people with chronic medical conditions, the poor and those without health insurance are more likely to struggle with "serious psychological distress," U.S. health officials reported Thursday.

Serious [psychological distress](#) is a term that identifies people who are likely to be diagnosed with a mental disorder that limits their lives, according to the researchers. Overall, they found that about 3 percent of Americans surveyed have serious psychological distress.

"People with serious psychological distress have a lot of challenges," said report co-author Laura Pratt, an epidemiologist at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. "People with [mental health problems](#) have a lot of needs that aren't being met."

In the report, the researchers used data from the National Health Interview Survey. The information was gathered from 2009 through 2013.

People were asked if during the past month they felt:

- "so sad that nothing could cheer you up"
- "nervous"
- "restless or fidgety"
- "hopeless"
- "that everything was an effort"
- "worthless."

The more "yes" answers, the more severe the condition, Pratt said.

The researchers found:

- regardless of age, women were more likely to have serious psychological distress than men.
- as income increased, the number of those with serious psychological distress decreased.
- people 18 to 64 with serious psychological distress were more likely to be uninsured (30 percent) than those without the condition (20.5 percent).
- more than 27 percent of those 65 and older with serious psychological distress had limitations in daily living.
- sufferers were more likely to have COPD (chronic [obstructive pulmonary disease](#)), heart disease and diabetes than those without serious psychological distress.

Dr. Alan Manevitz, a clinical psychiatrist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, said people with mental illness are also more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, use drugs, engage in unsafe sexual practices, not eat a healthy diet and not exercise. He pointed out that all of these things can make people sicker and shorten their lives. People with mental illnesses are also more likely to be poor, and in some cases, homeless, he said.

In addition, many of these people have difficulty getting care and have problems following medical directions, he said.

"Mental illness is underdiagnosed by doctors and by patients themselves," Manevitz said. "Only one in five people who have a mental illness are identified and get help," he said.

Manevitz said more attention and resources need to be focused on [mental illness](#) and distress. The amount of money spent on mental [health](#) is a fraction of what is spent on [medical health](#), he said.

"There has to be integrated care that includes mental and medical health," he said. "Integrating mental and medical care is a movement that is already underway and needs to be encouraged."

Manevitz added that mental problems can be treated. Identifying and treating them early can lessen the effect the illness has on a person's life, he said.

More information: For more on serious psychological distress visit the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#).

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