

Study: Mental disorders and access to mental health care

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Friday, September 22, 2023

In 2022, more than 5 million people in Canada met the diagnostic criteria for a mood, anxiety or substance use disorder, with the prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders increasing substantially over the previous 10 years.

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing a study titled "[Mental disorders and access to mental health care](#)," using new data from the Mental Health and Access to Care Survey. The study examines changes in the share of Canadians meeting the diagnostic criteria for some specific mental disorders, regardless of whether they received a diagnosis from a health care professional.

Prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder doubles since 2012

The study found that the proportion of Canadians aged 15 years and older with a generalized anxiety disorder doubled from 2012 to 2022, from 2.6% to 5.2%. Similar increases were seen for the 12-month prevalence of major depressive episodes, up from 4.7% in 2012 to 7.6% in 2022, and bipolar disorders, which went from 1.5% to 2.1% over the same period.

The largest 10-year increases were seen among young people, particularly young women aged 15 to 24 years, for whom the prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder tripled and that of major depressive episode doubled. While data on social phobia are not available for 2012, comparisons with 2002 suggest a fourfold increase in the prevalence of social phobia among young women, from 6.1% in 2002 to 24.7% in 2022.

Although some of these upward trends in the prevalence of specific mental health conditions may be related to increased stress during the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall worsening of mental health among young people was observed well before 2020.

Decrease in alcohol use disorders since 2012

Despite recent increases in alcohol-induced mortality, as well as unintentional (accidental) poisonings from and exposure to noxious substances, including overdoses from prescription, over-the-counter and illicit substances, the 10-year trend in the prevalence of substance use disorders does not show the same increase.

The percentage of Canadians aged 15 years and older who met diagnostic criteria for alcohol use disorders in the previous 12 months decreased from 3.2% in 2012 to 2.2% in 2022. This decrease was driven by a change among young men aged 15 to 24 years old.

Also, the 12-month prevalence of cannabis use disorders was stable, at 1.4% in 2022 (1.3% in 2012), as was the prevalence of other substance use disorders, at 0.5% in 2022 (0.7% in 2012).

Mood, anxiety and substance use disorders lower among certain racialized groups

In 2022, the overall prevalence of mood, anxiety and substance use disorders varied among racialized groups.

The prevalence was lower among Chinese, Filipino, South Asian and Black people in Canada, as compared with non-racialized, non-Indigenous people. Differences in prevalence could be related to socio-cultural differences in willingness to report symptoms of mental illness or related to the stigma associated with mental illness.

About half of Canadians with a mental disorder receive professional help

Among the 18.3% of Canadians aged 15 years and older who met diagnostic criteria for a mood, anxiety or substance use disorder in the 12 months before the survey, about half (48.8%) reported that they had talked to a health professional about their mental health in the previous year.



They were most likely to report having talked to a family doctor or general practitioner (32.4%). Fewer people reported talking to a mental health care specialist such as a psychiatrist, psychologist or psychotherapist.

Counselling (43.8%) topped the list of the most common form of mental health care received by people with a mental disorder. This was followed by medication (36.5%) and mental health information (32.0%). Despite counselling being the most common type of care received, people were most likely to report unmet needs for counselling services compared with medication or information needs.

Note to readers

The Mental Health and Access to Care Survey (MHACS) collects information on the mental health status of Canadians, as well as their access to and need for services and supports, whether formal or informal. This survey also aims to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on population health and evaluate changes in patterns of mental health and the use of services in the previous 10 years. This analysis is based on data collected from March 17 to July 31, 2022.

MHACS used a modified version of the World Health Organization's Composite International Diagnostic Interview to classify people with select mood, anxiety or substance use disorders. Although this is not a clinical diagnosis, this is a standardized instrument that is used to assess mental disorders in population surveys according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders version IV (DSM-IV) criteria.

For this study, prevalence estimates for each disorder included whether diagnostic criteria were met within the 12 months before completing the survey. This 12-month prevalence was used when evaluating the use of mental health care services among people with mental disorders.

For more information on survey definitions and methods, refer to the Statistics Canada survey information page: [Mental Health and Access to Care Survey \(MHACS\)](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5015](#).

The article entitled "[Mental disorders and access to mental health care](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

The infographic "[Mental disorders in Canada, 2022](#)," is now available in the series *Statistics Canada - Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).