

4 AFFECTIVE DISORDERS IN AUSTRALIA

Three different types of affective disorders were asked about in the 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing. Depressive episode is characterised by periods of low mood lasting at least two weeks that are accompanied by symptoms such as loss of appetite, feelings of worthlessness, difficulty concentrating and suicidal thoughts. Dysthymia is characterised by a more longstanding low mood lasting for two years or more. The third form of affective disorder is bipolar affective disorder, characterised by periods of elevated or irritable mood, often fluctuating with periods of depression.

4.1 Prevalence of affective disorders in the Australian population

In the 12 months prior to interview 6.2% of Australians aged 16-85 years had affective disorders (Table 4-1). Females were more likely than males to have affective disorders (7.1% in females compared to 5.3% in males).

Depressive episode was the most common type of affective disorder with a prevalence of around one in twenty-five (4.1%) in the population. Dysthymia and bipolar affective disorder were less common with an overall prevalence in the population of 1.3% and 1.8% respectively.

Table 4-1: Prevalence of 12-month affective disorders by affective disorder type and sex

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Persons (%)
Depressive episode	3.1	5.1	4.1
Dysthymia	1.0	1.5	1.3
Bipolar affective disorder	1.8	1.7	1.8
Any affective disorder	5.3	7.1	6.2

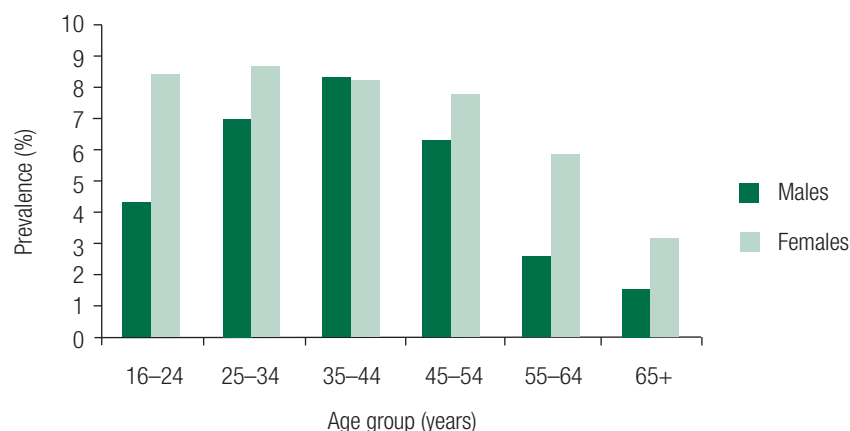
Note: Totals are lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of affective disorder in the 12 months.

4.2 Prevalence of affective disorders in different population sub-groups

4.2.1 Sex and age

The prevalence of affective disorders was higher in females (7.1% compared to 5.3% in males). This difference between the sexes was also true for depressive episode and dysthymia, which were around one and a half times higher in females. However, males and females experienced similar rates of bipolar affective disorder (1.8% and 1.7% respectively).

The prevalence of affective disorders was not strongly associated with age and the pattern varied between males and females (Figure 4-1). For females, the prevalence started high and declined in the older age groups. While for males the prevalence started lower, peaked for 35-44 year olds and then declined with increasing age.

Figure 4-1: Prevalence of 12-month affective disorders by age and sex

4.2.2 Social and demographic characteristics

Affective disorders were more likely to occur among those who were widowed, separated or divorced (11.2%) and never married (9.3%) compared to those who were married or in de facto relationships (4.1%). The prevalence of affective disorders was highest among those who were unemployed (14.9%) compared to those not in the labour force (9.8%), and lowest among those who were employed (5.3%). It was highest for people who did not complete school (8.1%) and lowest for those with school qualifications only (4.2%) when compared with those with post-school qualifications (6.3%). The prevalence of affective disorders did not vary significantly by country of birth. However, there was a modest trend for people born in non-English speaking countries to have a lower prevalence of affective disorders (4.5%) compared to those born in Australia (6.6%) or another English-speaking country (6.0%) (Table 4-2).

Table 4-2: Prevalence of 12-month affective disorders by sex, marital status, labour force status, education and country of birth

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Persons (%)
Marital status			
Married/De facto	2.4	5.4	4.1
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	14.3	8.8	11.2
Never married	7.8	10.7	9.3
Labour force status			
Employed	4.8	5.6	5.3
Unemployed	13.3	15.1	14.9
Not in the labour force	9.9	10.0	9.8
Education			
Post-school qualification	5.7	7.0	6.3
School qualification only	3.4	5.3	4.2
Did not complete school	6.6	9.5	8.1
Country of birth			
Australia	5.6	7.6	6.6
Other English-speaking country	5.0	7.3	6.0
Non-English speaking country	4.1	4.9	4.5

Note: Numbers presented for marital status, labour force status and education are age-standardised.

4.3 Impact of affective disorders

In general, people with affective disorders were more likely than people with anxiety or substance use disorders to experience greater levels of impairment due to their mental disorders. Impairment can be measured in a number of ways, some of which are outlined below.

4.3.1 Days out of role

People with affective disorders reported 6.2 days out of role in the previous 30 days. The average number of days that people were not able to carry out their normal activities for each type of affective disorder is presented in Table 4-3.

Dysthymia was associated with the highest number of days out of role with an average of 9.7 days out of role in the previous 30 days.

Table 4-3: Days out of role by type of 12-month affective disorder

	Days out of role in previous 30 days (mean)
Depressive episode	6.4
Dysthymia	9.7
Bipolar affective disorder	5.3
Any affective disorder	6.2

Note: Total is lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of affective disorder.

4.3.2 Interference with life

Mental disorders can impact on all aspects of people's lives. The Sheehan Disability Scales included in the survey assessed interference with life across four domains, namely home responsibilities, work or study, close relationships and social life. Table 4-4 shows the proportion of people with each type of affective disorder who reported severe or very severe interference in each of these four domains.

People with depressive episode and dysthymia experienced the highest levels of interference across all domains of life (71.8% and 71.1%). Social life was most affected, with over half of people with depressive episode and with dysthymia experiencing severe or very severe interference in this domain (54.2% and 54.0% respectively). Interference with home life was also very high for those with dysthymia (51.3%).

Table 4-4: Proportion of people with severe or very severe interference across different life domains by type of 12-month affective disorder

	Home (%)	Work or study (%)	Close relationships (%)	Social life (%)	Any domain (%)
Depressive episode	37.4	40.3	39.9	54.2	71.8
Dysthymia	51.3	33.2	42.7	54.0	71.1
Bipolar affective disorder	28.0	23.2	27.5	29.4	41.4

Note: Any domain is lower than the sum of individual domains as people may have experienced severe or very severe interference in more than one life domain.

4.3.3 Psychological distress

Psychological distress was measured using the Kessler 10 scale (K10). The proportion of people with each type of affective disorder reporting each of the four levels of psychological distress, as scored on the K10, is presented in Table 4-5.

High to very high levels of psychological distress were reported by two thirds (66.5%) of people with dysthymia. Levels of psychological distress were very similar for people with depressive episode and bipolar affective disorder, with high to very high levels reported by 52.1% and 51.9% of people with these mental disorders respectively.

Table 4-5: Proportion of people with each psychological distress (K10) level by type of 12-month affective disorder

	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)	Very high (%)
Depressive episode	19.7	28.2	29.8	22.3
Dysthymia	9.8	23.7	39.5	27.0
Bipolar affective disorder	17.1	31.0	29.7	22.2
Any affective disorder	19.3	28.6	29.9	22.2

Note: Totals are lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of affective disorder.

4.4 Service use by people with affective disorders

The proportion of people with each type of affective disorder who consulted health professionals for their mental health problems in the 12 months prior to the interview is shown in Table 4-6. The proportion that reported using services was similar for those with depressive episode and dysthymia (61.3% and 62.8% respectively), while only half (52.7%) of people with bipolar affective disorder reported using services.

Table 4-6: Service use by type of 12-month affective disorder

	Service use (%)
Depressive episode	61.3
Dysthymia	62.8
Bipolar affective disorder	52.7
Any affective disorder	58.6

Note: Total is lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of affective disorder.