

Mood and anxiety disorders affect many older adults

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Rates of mood and anxiety disorders appear to decline with age but the conditions remain common in older adults, especially women, according to a report in the May issue of *Archives of General Psychiatry*.

"Knowledge of the prevalence of mood and [anxiety disorders](#) and co-existing mood-anxiety disorder in older community-dwelling adults is important; these are hidden and undertreated but treatable disorders associated with poor health outcomes," the authors write as background information in the article.

Amy L. Byers, Ph.D., M.P.H., of the University of California, San Francisco, and San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center, and colleagues determined nationally representative estimates of mood, anxiety and combined mood and anxiety disorders using a sample of 2,575 survey participants age 55 and older. Of these, 43 percent were ages 55 to 64; 32 percent, 65 to 74 years; 20 percent, 75 to 84 years; and 5 percent, 85 years or older.

A total of 5 percent of participants had a [mood disorder](#), including [major depressive disorder](#) or bipolar disorder, within the previous year. Rates of anxiety disorders—such as panic disorder, agoraphobia, other phobias, [generalized anxiety disorder](#) and posttraumatic stress disorder—were 12 percent overall. About 3 percent had co-occurring mood and anxiety disorders.

Prevalence of all the conditions declined with age. When comparing

persons age 55 to 64 with those age 85 and older, 7.6 percent vs. 2.4 percent had mood disorders, 16.6 percent vs. 8.1 percent had anxiety disorders, and 4.8 percent vs. 0 percent had both conditions.

Women were more likely to have any of the disorders than men; 6.4 percent of women and 3 percent of men had mood disorders, 14.7 percent of women and 7.6 percent of men had anxiety disorders, and 3.7 of women and 1.6 percent of men had both.

"The study of nationally representative samples provides evidence for research and policy planning that helps to define community-based priorities for future psychiatric research," the authors write. "The findings of this study emphasize the importance of individual and co-existing mood and anxiety disorders when studying [older adults](#), even the oldest cohorts. Further study of risk factors, course and severity is needed to target intervention, prevention and health care needs."

"Given the rapid aging of the U.S. population, the potential public health burden of late-life mental health disorders will likely grow as well, suggesting the importance of continued epidemiologic monitoring of the mental health status of the young-old, mid-old, old-old and oldest-old cohorts," they conclude.

More information: Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2010;67[5]:489-496.

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