

# Resilience amongst the long-term ill

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People who have a long term debilitating physical illness demonstrate mental resilience according to Understanding Society, the world's largest longitudinal household study. The first findings reveal that people diagnosed with cancer, diabetes, respiratory or cardiovascular disease report similar mental health scores to those without physical illness. The survey's findings suggest that those people who may not be able to function well physically because of an illness do not necessarily suffer problems with their mental health - for example with their concentration, confidence and feelings of strain.

Another surprise finding from the study is that over half (52 per cent) of those indicating high levels of distress and anxiety, and therefore identified as at risk of suffering minor [mental illness](#), still report fairly positive overall mental well-being.

Professor Amanda Sacker, Institute for Social and Economic Research, who analysed the findings, commented: "Initial findings regarding mental health may appear counter-intuitive but it is good to see such resilience amongst those with long term physical illnesses.

Understanding Society will continue to follow the same people in years to come as they get older. As they change their health-related behaviours and experience different health, work and family challenges this will give us a good insight into the factors that cause [mental health problems](#) and how to provide the best support."

Initial analysis of the data collected in the first survey also found that:

- self rated [mental health](#) did not differ between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- there are no differences between [males and females](#), with 50 per cent rating their overall health as either 'excellent' or 'very good'
- thirty-seven per cent of males and 38 per cent of females have a long term illness; of these 68 per cent of males and 71 per cent of females reported limitations in the last month. Climbing stairs as well as the amount and kinds of work that can be done were the most common stated, with women tending to report recent limitations more than men
- asthma, arthritis and high blood pressure are the three most prevalent conditions, each affecting over 10 per cent of the sample
- overall figures indicate that seven per cent of the total population (approximately 25,000 respondents) have at some point in their lives been diagnosed with clinical depression and that of those people the majority (69 per cent), currently suffer from depression.

Understanding Society is following 40,000 UK households over many years and will revisit health, family life, employment and a range of other aspects of people's lives. The survey is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and managed by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex. The first findings book is published online at <http://research.understandingsociety.org.uk/findings/early-findings>. Individual chapters are also available to download.

The first set of data from Understanding Society is now available for

researchers to use in their analysis. It can be accessed via the Economic and Social Data Service.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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