

Outcomes for the mentally ill do not improve with age

November 3 2014, by David Stacey

New research has confirmed that people with severe mental disorders who reach older age have lower life expectancy compared with their peers.

The study found that hazardous lifestyle choices, suboptimal access to [health](#) care, poor compliance with treatments, and greater severity of medical comorbidities all contributed to increase mortality.

"It is concerning to see that even after reaching old age, people with past history of [mental disorders](#) are still disadvantaged. The good news is that, unlike young adults, most older adults will visit their [primary care physician](#) at least once a year. This offers [health professionals](#) a valuable opportunity to intervene in order to minimise the harms associated with severe mental disorders," lead author, psychiatrist and research director at The University of Western Australia's Centre for Health and Ageing, Professor Osvaldo Almeida said.

"It is imperative that we do all that we can to seize this opportunity by educating not only patients but also health professionals on how to manage the common risk factors and medical morbidities of [older adults](#) with a history of mental disorders.

"Intervening, even at this late stage in life, would make a marked difference to the quality of life of these people and would decrease the long term costs associated with their medical care," Professor Almeida said.

The data was compiled from The Health In Men Study, which is a [longitudinal study](#) of some 38,000 men aged 65-85 years at study entry. Their past mental health history was retrieved via health record linkage and mortality data monitored until the end of 2010.

The researchers identified 5.8 per cent of men from the study as having severe mental disorders.

"Our results are limited to men, although the results of other similar studies indicate that the life expectancy of women with severe mental disorders is similarly reduced," Professor Almeida said.

Mortality among People with Severe Mental Disorders Who Reach Old Age: A Longitudinal Study of a Community-Representative Sample of 37892 Men has been published in *PLOS One*.

More information: Almeida OP, Hankey GJ, Yeap BB, Golledge J, Norman PE, et al. (2014) "Mortality among People with Severe Mental Disorders Who Reach Old Age: A Longitudinal Study of a Community-Representative Sample of 37892 Men." *PLoS ONE* 9(10): e111882. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0111882](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0111882)

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