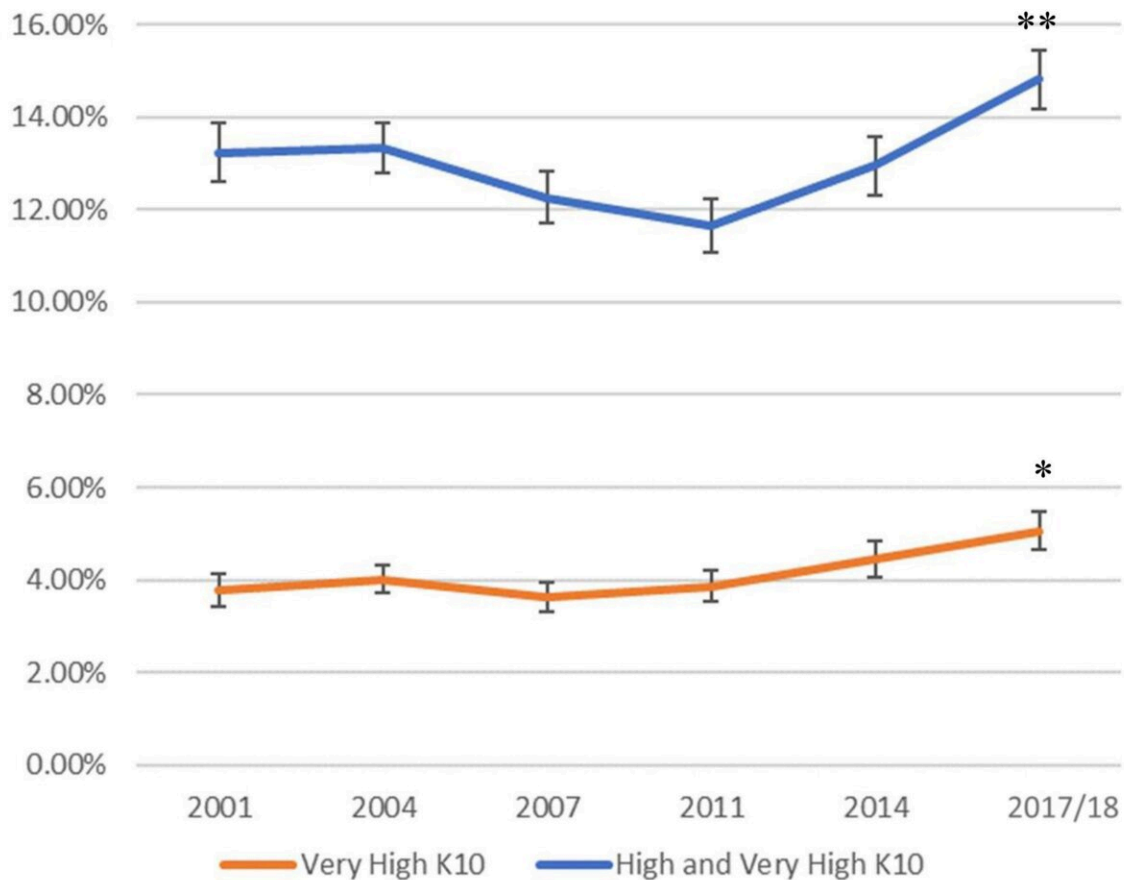


# **Australian women suffering high levels of mental distress due to financial insecurity**

April 1 2022

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Year	n	K10 very-high			K10 high/very-high		
		95%	CI	95%	CI		
2001	14641	3.78%	3.42%	4.13%	13.24%	12.60%	13.89%
2004	15168	4.02%	3.72%	4.33%	13.34%	12.81%	13.87%
2007	12604	3.62%	3.30%	3.94%	12.27%	11.71%	12.83%
2011	12332	3.86%	3.52%	4.20%	11.65%	11.07%	12.23%
2014	11296	4.44%	4.05%	4.83%	12.95%	12.31%	13.58%
2017/18	12183	5.06%	4.66%	5.46%	14.81%	14.16%	15.46%

Age-standardized prevalence of psychological distress in the Australian working age population, 2001–2017. aStandardized to 2001 Australian Census. Derived from a total of n = 78,204 survey participants aged 18–64 years. \*\*Rate at 2017 significantly greater than all previous years (p Frontiers in Psychiatry (2022). DOI: 10.3389/fpsyt.2022.815904

One in five Australian women aged 55 to 64 have high levels of mental distress associated with financial insecurity, an increase of 40% in the last 20 years, according to an analysis led by Monash University.

Researchers examined Australian psychological distress trends from 2001 to 2018 from six national health surveys that showed a 40% increase in mental distress disproportionately affecting women aged 55 to 64, young women and those from low-income backgrounds. More recent data highlights that post-COVID-19, one in five women have high to very high distress.

The results are now published in *Frontiers in Psychiatry*.

This alarming trend has only been exacerbated by COVID-19 as more women faced job losses, increased caring and domestic responsibilities and loss of income for retirement with women accounting for 80% of superannuation withdrawals during the pandemic.

The first author Dr. Joanne Enticott, Head of Mental Health Epidemiology Research at the Monash School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine, says there is a greater risk of depression in populations with higher income inequality and the pandemic has exacerbated the endemic problems of gender inequity, built on generational societal change.

"Financial economic security for Australian women is at an all-time low, and women and their families continue to be relatively disadvantaged. There is an urgent need for a bold new agenda that delivers broader cooperation to improve [financial insecurity](#) and optimize mental and physical health," Dr. Enticott said.

Australia's gender inequity gap is widening with the World Economic Forum showing Australia has dropped to 50th on the global gender gap index. This is due to increasing gender disparity around [economic opportunities](#) for women, which causes financial insecurity, linked to elevated mental distress in Australian women.

Professor Helena Teede, Director of the Monash Centre for Research Health and Implementation (MCHRI), says we can no longer fail to recognize and address the fact that inequity by gender is a major challenge in this country with key health and wellbeing impacts, especially for women.

"There have been attempted strategies to improve women's economic security that has not yet delivered for women. With financial insecurity the primary determinant of health, if society does not fix this problem, many Australian women face unprecedented physical and mental health challenges," Professor Teede said.

Monash University is working with the Federal Government to establish a national institute to support women of all ages. It will work across the social determinants of health with a strong focus on financial insecurity and equity to optimize health and wellbeing.

"The institute will better serve women and their families through greater partnership, with women by women, for women. The national institute will be expanded to advance women's careers to improve financial inequity and reduce mental distress," said Professor Teede.

Dr. Enticott added: "It's time to focus on the health and wellbeing of women and the proposed institute will enable the establishment of a national approach to optimizing wellbeing, mental and [physical health](#)."

**More information:** Joanne Enticott et al, Mental Health in Australia:

Psychological Distress Reported in Six Consecutive Cross-Sectional National Surveys From 2001 to 2018, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (2022).  
[DOI: 10.3389/fpsy.2022.815904](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.815904)

Provided by Monash University

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