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## 1 in 5 U.S. adults suffers mental illness

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THURSDAY, Jan. 19 (HealthDay News) -- Nearly 46 million American adults have had a mental illness in the past year, a new government report shows.

Almost 30 percent of those aged 18 to 25 experienced a mental illness, twice as many as those aged 50 and older at just over 14 percent. And more women than men suffered a mental illness in the last year (23 percent vs. nearly 17 percent), according to the report released Thursday from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).



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"We all know people who have had a depression or an anxiety disorder, maybe something more serious like a bipolar disorder, but this is a pretty big number," said Peter Delany, director of SAMHSA's Office of Applied Studies.

"This is only the second year where we have done this as a separate report and the findings were not significantly different from last year," Delany noted, so there are not enough data to see a trend.

The reasons why so many people are suffering from these problems cannot be easily summed up, he said.

The recent economic downturn may be a factor for some, he said. "But these conditions are multifactorial -- there are genetic issues, there are biological issues, there are social issues and also personal issues," Delany explained.

A lot of people who are not receiving treatment for their mental illness, he said, cite lack of insurance as the main reason why.

"There are people who know they have a mental health problem, but aren't interested in getting care," he added.

"We know with the appropriate use of medication and with good treatment people can recover and go on to lead very healthy and productive lives," Delany said.

The new report defines mental illness as having a mental, behavioral or emotional problem based on criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, which is the standard reference for mental illness. The report excluded developmental and substance use disorders.

According to the report, some 11.4 million adults suffered from serious mental illness in the past year, which is defined as an illness that affected a person's ability to function normally.

Mental illness doesn't just affect people, but also takes an economic toll -- about \$300 billion in 2002, the researchers said.

Mental illness also accounts for more disability in developed countries than any other illness, including cancer and heart disease, according to the World Health Organization.

Highlights of the report include:

- About 39 percent of those with a mental illness received mental health services.
- Nearly 61 percent of those with severe mental illness received services.

- 8.7 million Americans had suicidal thoughts in the last year.
- 2.5 million made plans to kill themselves.
- 1.1 million attempted suicide.
- People who abuse drugs or alcohol had higher rates of mental illness than others (20 percent vs. about 6 percent).
- One-fourth of those with serious mental illness were substance abusers.
- 1.9 million 12- to 17-year-olds had a major depression in the past year.
- Teens suffering depression were twice as likely to have a drug problem than teens who did not have a major depression (roughly 37 percent vs. 18 percent).

Dr. Ihsan Salloum, director of the Addiction Psychiatry and Psychiatric Comorbidity Programs at the University of Miami School of Medicine, said not only is the number of people with mental problems staggering, but so is the unmet need for care.

"There is a gap between the need and how many people reach treatment," he said. "Mental illness is a treatable problem, and the outcome is as good as any chronic medical problem."

Given the number of people with drug and alcohol problems who also have mental problems, those with a substance abuse problem should also be screened for a mental problem, Salloum said.

"If someone has a severe mental disorder and an addiction, it is imperative to take care of both problems, because the two problems feed on each other causing a bad outcome," he said.

And with the number of young people with these problems, the focus should be on prevention, Salloum added.

### More information

To learn about mental health, visit the [U.S. National Institute of Mental Health](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/).



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