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**Coverage**  
Great Britain  
**Theme**  
Health and Care

## Better or worse: a follow-up study of the mental health of adults in Great Britain

Six per cent of people who did not have a common mental illness (such as anxiety and depression) when interviewed in 2000 had such a disorder when they were interviewed again 18 months later. A report\* published today by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that there was little difference between women (seven per cent) and men (six per cent), or between age-groups.

The report, *Better or worse: a longitudinal study of the mental health of adults living in private households in Great Britain*, presents the findings of a study commissioned by the Department of Health and the Scottish Executive. This involved a follow-up of the 2,406 people who had been interviewed in the 2000 Psychiatric Morbidity Survey in Great Britain. It covered common mental disorders, smoking, alcohol and drug misuse and topics such as quality of life and treatment and use of services.

The survey also found that of the 750 people who had a common mental disorder when first interviewed, 51 per cent of men and 49 per cent of women did not have a disorder at the follow-up interview. Recovery rates did not vary significantly by age.

The number of stressful life events a person experienced, such as bereavement, life-threatening illness or serious financial difficulties, had a big impact on the likelihood of both the onset of an episode of common mental disorder and recovery, particularly when life events between the two interviews were considered. For example, while the rate of episode onset among women who had not experienced any stressful life events between interviews was three per cent, this rose to 22 per cent for those who reported three or more such events.

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\* *Better or worse: a longitudinal study of the mental health of adults living in Great Britain*

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**Available free on the National Statistics website:**

[www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=10497](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=10497)

### Other key findings include:

- People who were of lower socio-economic status were less likely to recover from common mental disorder, as were the long term sick and disabled and those who were not employed at the time of both interviews.
- The study found an annual incidence of suicidal thoughts of four per cent overall (three per cent among men and five per cent among women). Incidence was highest among 16-24 year olds, 10 per cent of them reported onset of suicidal thoughts compared with 4-6 per cent of those in other age groups.
- Ten per cent of people who did not have a drink problem at the time of the first interview were assessed as showing onset of hazardous or dependent drinking in the period between interviews. This was more common among men (13 per cent) than women (seven per cent).
- Of those at initial interview who reported no use of illegal drugs in the previous year, four per cent reported using a non-prescription drug in the period between interviews - most commonly cannabis.
- Twenty-three per cent of people said they received some treatment or services for a mental health problem at either interview.
- Women were more likely to have received treatment for a mental health problem or used services of all types than men: 29 per cent of women had either received treatment or services compared with 17 per cent of men. While younger men were less likely than older men to have used services or received treatment, age was not a factor in women.
- Common mental disorder had a negative impact on quality of life, being associated with a lower likelihood of employment, and more financial problems and difficulties with activities of daily living. People who had a disorder at both interviews were worst affected. For example, 49 per cent of those with a disorder at both interviews reported financial difficulties compared with only 18 per cent of those without disorder at either interview.

## BACKGROUND NOTES

1. A more detailed summary of the report is available from the ONS Press Office.
2. In total 2,406 people completed full interviews in both stages of the study. The original sample included people aged 16-74 residing in private households in Great Britain. The follow-up interviews took place between September and December 2001.
3. **Common mental disorders**, sometimes called neurotic disorders or depression and anxiety disorders, are characterised by a variety of symptoms such as fatigue and sleep problems, forgetfulness and concentration difficulties, irritability, worry, panic, hopelessness, and obsessions and compulsions, which are present to such a degree that they cause problems with daily activities and distress. The prevalence of common mental disorders in the week prior to interview was assessed using the revised version of the Clinical Interview Schedule (CIS-R).
4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
5. **National Statistics** are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2003.