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Positive mental health and mental illness

Based on results of the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey – Mental Health, 76.9% of Canadians aged 15 or older were categorized as having flourishing mental health. That is, they generally felt good about and functioned well in daily life. A further 1.5% were classified as languishing (low positive emotions, low positive functioning), while 21.6% were in moderate mental health (neither flourishing nor languishing).

When these mental health classifications were combined with information on the presence or absence of a mental illness, an estimated 72.5% of Canadians (19.8 million) were considered to have complete mental health. That is, they were flourishing, and they did not meet the criteria for any of six major mental disorders: depression, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and alcohol, cannabis or other drug abuse or dependence.

Men and women were equally likely to have complete mental health: 72% and 73%, respectively. However, a number of other factors were associated with the likelihood of having complete mental health: age, marital status, income, education, employment status, spirituality, and physical health.

The percentage of people with complete mental health tended to be higher at older ages, rising from 65% at ages 15 to 24 to almost 80% at age 65 or older.

Having a partner was also associated with complete mental health. While 77% of people with a partner were in complete mental health, the figure was 72% among those who were widowed, separated or divorced, and 64% among those who were single.

Lower income and levels of education were associated with a lower likelihood of complete mental health. About two-thirds of people who lived in households in the lowest income quintile were in complete mental health, compared with more than three-quarters of those in the highest household income quintile. As well, while 69% of people who had not completed postsecondary education were in complete mental health, the percentage was 74% among those who had completed postsecondary studies.

People who reported that religious or spiritual beliefs were important in their daily lives were significantly more likely to be in complete mental health than were those not classified as having strong spirituality: 76% versus 66%, respectively.

Those with pain that prevented most activities were less likely to be in complete mental health than were people with no pain: 55% versus 75%.



Note to readers

Mental health and mental illness are separate but related concepts. The former refers to the presence or absence of mental health; the latter, to the presence or absence of mental illness.

The Mental Health Continuum – Short Form contains 14 questions that assess perceptions of emotional well-being (feeling happy and satisfaction with and interest in life) and positive functioning (for example, self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life or positive relationships with others).

***Flourishing mental health** requires a response of "almost every day" or "every day" to 1 or more of the 3 emotional well-being questions, and to 6 or more of the 11 positive functioning questions.*

***Languishing mental health** requires a response of "once or twice a month" or "never" to 1 or more of the 3 emotional well-being questions and to 6 or more of the 11 positive functioning questions.*

***Moderate mental health** refers to people who are neither flourishing nor languishing.*

***Complete mental health** means both flourishing and being free of mental illness.*

To estimate the prevalence of complete mental health, the percentages of Canadians age 15 or older in three mental health categories (flourishing, languishing and moderate mental health) were assessed in combination with the presence or absence of six mental illnesses measured in the 2012 Canadian Community Health Survey – Mental Health: depression, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and alcohol, cannabis or other drug abuse or dependence.

These data are based on self-reported responses and do not include all possible mental disorders.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 5015.

The study, "Positive mental health and mental illness," is available in the September 2014 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 25, no. 9 (82-003-X) from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Heather Gilmour (613-951-2114; heather.gilmour@statcan.gc.ca), Health Analysis Division.

This issue of *Health Reports* contains another article, "Symptom onset, diagnosis and management of osteoarthritis ."

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