

5 ANXIETY DISORDERS IN AUSTRALIA

The 2007 survey asked about six types of anxiety disorders. All six share the common experience of intense and debilitating anxiety. These are as follows:

- Panic disorder**
 Sudden bursts of extreme anxiety that are accompanied by symptoms like a pounding heart, sweaty palms, and shortness of breath or nausea.
- Agoraphobia**
 Anxiety about being in places or situations from which it is difficult to escape should a panic attack occur.
- Social phobia (also called social anxiety disorder)**
 Strong fear of social interaction or performance situations because of the potential for embarrassment or humiliation.
- Generalized anxiety disorder**
 Long periods of uncontrollable worry about everyday issues or events, which is typically accompanied by feelings of fatigue, restlessness or difficulty concentrating.
- Posttraumatic stress disorder**
 Recurrent and intrusive memories of a trauma, feelings of emotional numbing and detachment, and increases in emotional arousal, such as irritability and disturbed sleep, resulting from a previous traumatic event.
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder**
 Repeated thoughts, images or impulses that the person feels are inappropriate, and repetitive behaviours, designed to reduce the anxiety generated by the thoughts.

5.1 Prevalence of anxiety disorders in the Australian population

Anxiety disorders was the most common class of mental disorders with one in seven (14.4%) people experiencing anxiety disorders in the 12 months prior to interview. Posttraumatic stress disorder (6.4%) and social phobia (4.7%) were the most common types of anxiety disorders (Table 5-1).

Table 5-1: Prevalence of 12-month anxiety disorders by anxiety disorder type and sex

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Persons (%)
Panic disorder	2.3	2.9	2.6
Agoraphobia	2.1	3.5	2.8
Social phobia	3.8	5.7	4.7
Generalized anxiety disorder	2.0	3.5	2.7
Posttraumatic stress disorder	4.6	8.3	6.4
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	1.6	2.2	1.9
Any anxiety disorder	10.8	17.9	14.4

Note: Totals are lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of anxiety disorder in the 12 months.

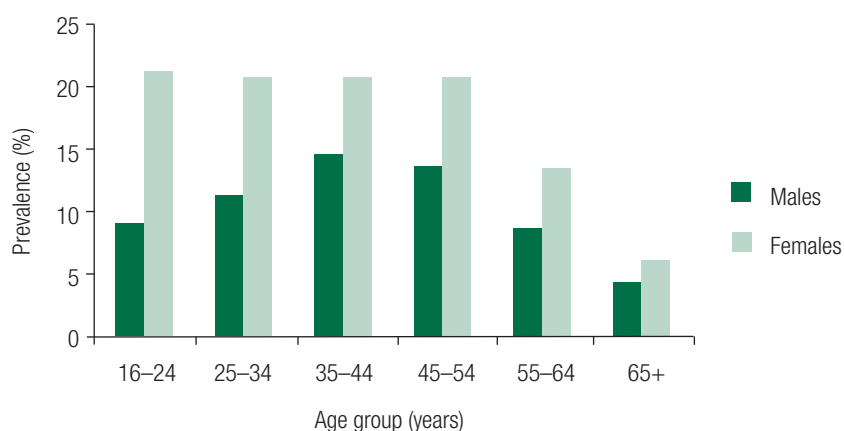
5.2 Prevalence of anxiety disorders in different population sub-groups

5.2.1 Sex and age

Females experienced a much higher rate of anxiety disorders compared to males (17.9% and 10.8% respectively). This was true for all types of anxiety disorders, except obsessive-compulsive disorder and panic disorder. However, the trend in these disorders was also for higher prevalence in females (Table 5-1).

The prevalence of anxiety disorders was related to age, however, this relationship was different for males and females (Figure 5-1). For females aged 16-54 years the prevalence was very similar, with around one in five females experiencing anxiety disorders. The prevalence then declined for females 55 years and over. For males, the prevalence peaked in the 35-44 year age group (14.9%) and then declined with increasing age.

Figure 5-1: Prevalence of 12-month anxiety disorders by age and sex



5.2.2 Social and demographic characteristics

The prevalence of anxiety disorders was highest in people who were widowed, separated or divorced (19.0%) and lowest in those who were married or in de facto relationships (13.3%). One in five (20.9%) people not in the labour force had anxiety disorders, compared to 13.0% of people in employment and 17.3% of people who were unemployed. The prevalence of anxiety disorders was associated with level of education, being highest in those who did not complete school (18.9%) and lowest among people with post-school qualifications (13.3%). There was no association between country of birth and anxiety disorders. However, there was a trend for people from non-English speaking countries to have a lower prevalence of anxiety disorder (9.9%) compared to those born in Australia (15.4%) or other English-speaking countries (14.0%) (Table 5-2).

Table 5-2: Prevalence of 12-month anxiety disorders by sex, marital status, labour force status, education and country of birth

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Persons (%)
Marital status			
Married/De facto	10.1	16.1	13.3
Separated/Divorced/Widowed	16.3	20.3	19.0
Never married	13.4	19.4	16.2
Labour force status			
Employed	10.7	15.5	13.0
Unemployed	10.9	22.7	17.3
Not in the labour force	16.9	23.1	20.9
Education			
Post-school qualification	10.0	16.5	13.3
School qualification only	10.8	21.3	15.7
Did not complete school	14.9	22.5	18.9
Country of birth			
Australia	11.5	19.2	15.4
Other English-speaking country	12.7	15.7	14.0
Non-English speaking country	5.8	13.5	9.9

Note: Numbers presented for marital status, labour force status and education are age-standardised.

5.3 Impact of anxiety disorders

5.3.1 Days out of role

The number of days out of the previous 30 days that people were unable to perform their normal activities varied considerably between types of anxiety disorders (Table 5-3). The average number of days out of role for people with anxiety disorders was 4.4 days. Agoraphobia was associated with the highest number of days out of role (6.9 days) and social phobia with the lowest (4.7 days).

Table 5-3: Days out of role by type of 12-month anxiety disorder

	Days out of role in previous 30 days (mean)
Panic disorder	5.9
Agoraphobia	6.9
Social phobia	4.7
Generalised anxiety disorder	6.3
Posttraumatic stress disorder	4.9
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	6.3
Any anxiety disorder	4.4

Note: Total is lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of anxiety disorder.

5.3.2 Interference with life

Interference with life was assessed separately for each type of anxiety disorder across four domains, which capture different aspects of people's lives (home responsibilities, work or study, close relationships and social life). Table 5-4 shows the percentage of people who reported severe or very severe interference in each of these four domains.

Generalized anxiety disorder was associated with the highest level of interference, with almost half (48.0%) of people with generalized anxiety disorder experiencing severe or very severe interference in at least one of the four domains of life.

Generally, social life was the domain in which most people experienced severe or very severe interference due to their anxiety disorder (ranging from 13.6% for posttraumatic stress disorder through to 37.8% for generalized anxiety disorder), followed by interference with close relationships (ranging from 10.7% for posttraumatic stress disorder through to 31.8% for generalized anxiety disorder). The exception to this was panic disorder, for which a higher proportion of people experienced severe or very severe interference with work or study (28.4%).

Table 5-4: Proportion of people with severe or very severe interference across different life domains by type of 12-month anxiety disorder

	Home (%)	Work or study (%)	Close relationships (%)	Social life (%)	Any domain (%)
Panic disorder	17.6	28.4	17.3	22.8	37.7
Agoraphobia	18.7	19.1	22.4	27.0	34.5
Social phobia	7.7	9.1	15.9	18.0	20.0
Generalized anxiety disorder	24.1	24.2	31.8	37.8	48.0
Posttraumatic stress disorder	9.6	10.7	10.7	13.6	20.0
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	10.7	9.7	14.5	16.2	24.7

Note: Any domain is lower than the sum of individual domains as people may have experienced severe or very severe interference in more than one life domain.

5.3.3 Psychological distress

The proportion of people with each type of anxiety disorder reporting each of the four levels of psychological distress, as scored on the Kessler 10 scale (K10), is presented in Table 5-5. Levels of psychological distress differed depending on the type of anxiety disorder.

High or very high psychological distress was experienced by 55.0% of people with agoraphobia and 53.2% of people with generalized anxiety disorder. Whereas two thirds (69.1%) of people with posttraumatic stress disorder experienced low to moderate levels of psychological distress.

Table 5-5: Proportion of people with each psychological distress (K10) level by type of 12-month anxiety disorder

	Low (%)	Moderate (%)	High (%)	Very high (%)
Panic disorder	24.9	27.3	27.8	20.0
Agoraphobia	20.7	24.3	31.9	23.1
Social phobia	24.2	35.8	22.5	17.4
Generalized anxiety disorder	15.1	31.7	29.4	23.8
Posttraumatic stress disorder	41.1	28.0	19.0	12.0
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	33.6	25.0	23.7	17.7
Any anxiety disorder	35.3	31.4	21.3	11.9

Note: Totals are lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of anxiety disorder.

5.4 Service use by people with anxiety disorders

The proportion of people with each type of anxiety disorder who used services for mental health problems in the previous 12 months is shown in Table 5-6. Overall, two-fifths (37.8%) of people with anxiety disorders used services in the previous 12 months.

There was a difference in the likelihood of whether people had used services for their mental health problems depending on the type of anxiety disorder they had. People with agoraphobia (61.2%) were most likely to have used services for their mental health problems in the previous 12 months, while people with posttraumatic stress disorder and social phobia were the least likely to use services (37.9% and 42.8% respectively). Just over half of people with panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder used services (55.0%, 55.1% and 50.2% respectively).

Table 5-6: Service use by type of 12-month anxiety disorder

	Service use (%)
Panic disorder	55.0
Agoraphobia	61.2
Social phobia	42.8
Generalized anxiety disorder	55.1
Posttraumatic stress disorder	37.9
Obsessive-compulsive disorder	50.2
Any anxiety disorder	37.8

Note: Total is lower than the sum of disorders as people may have had more than one type of anxiety disorder.

