

## 7 COMORBIDITY

Comorbidity refers to having more than one disorder within a given time period. This might be two or more mental disorders or a combination of mental disorders and physical conditions. In this chapter comorbidity between classes of mental disorder and between mental disorders and the National Health Priority Area chronic physical conditions (diabetes, asthma, coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer and arthritis) are examined.

### 7.1 Mental disorder comorbidity

People often experienced more than one class of mental disorder with one quarter (25.4%) of people with mental disorders experiencing two or more classes of mental disorders in the 12 months prior to interview (Table 7-1). A small proportion (3.5%) of people with mental disorders experienced all three classes of mental disorder (affective, anxiety and substance use disorders) in the previous 12 months.

**Table 7-1: Prevalence of 12-month mental disorder comorbidity in the total population and in people with 12-month mental disorders**

	Total population (%)	12-month disorder (%)
No disorder	80.0	-
One disorder class	14.9	74.6
Two disorder classes	4.4	21.9
Three disorder classes	0.7	3.5
Any mental disorder	20.0	-

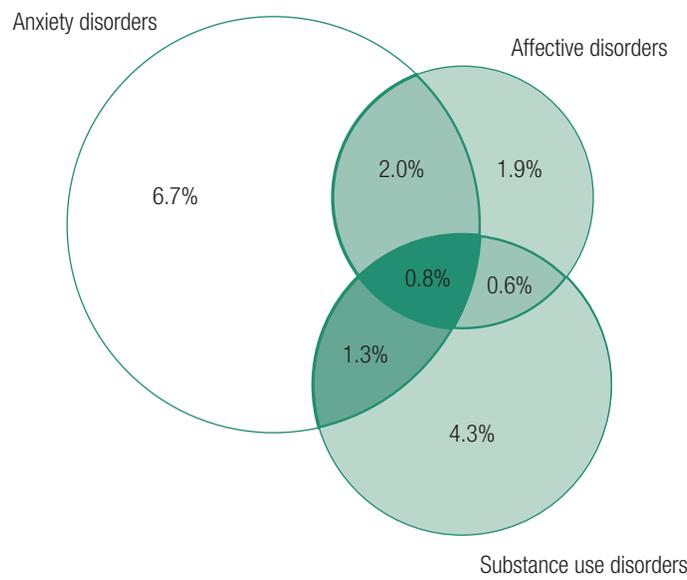
#### 7.1.1 Prevalence of mental disorder comorbidity by sex

The proportions of the population with comorbid mental disorders are shown in Figure 7-1 and Figure 7-2 for males and females respectively.

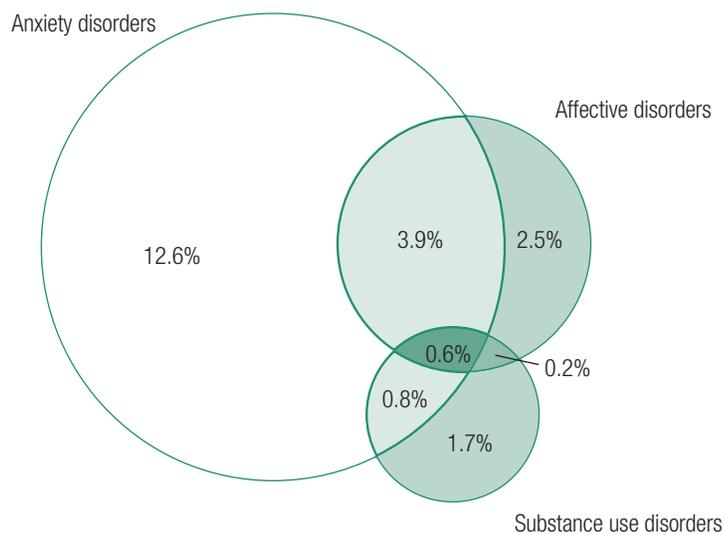
Affective and anxiety disorders were the most common form of comorbidity for both sexes, with females almost twice as likely as males to experience this type of comorbidity (2.0% in males and 3.9% in females). The next most common comorbidity for both sexes was substance use disorders in combination with anxiety disorders (1.3% in males and 0.8% in females).

The prevalence of comorbid mental disorders from all three classes was similar for males and females (0.8% and 0.6% respectively).

**Figure 7-1: Prevalence of comorbid 12-month affective, anxiety and substance use disorders in males**



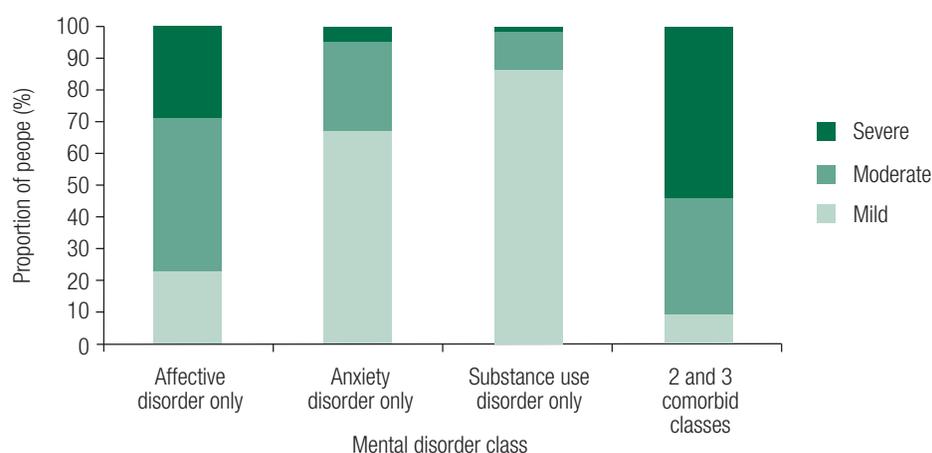
**Figure 7-2: Prevalence of comorbid 12-month affective, anxiety and substance use disorders in females**



## 7.2 Impact of comorbidity

### 7.2.1 Severity

There was a strong relationship between the level of comorbidity and severity of mental disorders (Figure 7-3). A greater proportion of people with more than one class of mental disorder experienced severe impairment due to their mental disorders compared to those with only one class of mental disorder. Over half (54.0%) of people with comorbid classes of mental disorder experienced severe levels of impairment, compared to one in twelve (7.5%) of those with only one class of mental disorder.

**Figure 7-3: Proportion of people with single and comorbid 12-month mental disorder classes by severity level**

### 7.2.2 Days out of role

Days out of role measures the number of days in the 30 days prior to interview that a person was unable to function in their usual role due to physical or mental health problems. The average days out of role increased with greater comorbidity (Table 7-2). People who did not have a 12-month mental disorder experienced about one and a half days out of role (1.4 days) in the 30 days prior to interview. Of those with only one mental disorder, those with affective disorders reported the highest number of days out of role (4.2 days). Those with affective and anxiety disorders reported the highest days out of role of those people with two disorders (7.6 days). However, people with all three mental disorder classes experienced nearly seven times as many days out of role compared to those without mental disorders (9.2 days compared to 1.4 days).

**Table 7-2: Days out of role by comorbidity of 12-month mental disorder classes**

	Days out of role in previous 30 days (mean)
No mental disorder	1.4
One mental disorder	
Affective disorder only	4.2
Anxiety disorder only	3.1
Substance use disorder only	1.7
Two or more mental disorders	
Affective and anxiety disorders	7.6
Affective and substance use disorders	2.0
Anxiety and substance use disorders	4.7
Affective, anxiety and substance use disorders	9.2
<b>Total population</b>	<b>1.9</b>

### 7.3 Mental and physical disorder comorbidity

The 2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing focussed on the six chronic physical conditions recognised as National Health Priority Areas (NHPA). These are diabetes, asthma, coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer and arthritis. Just less than one third (32.2%) of the population reported having at least one of the NHPA chronic physical conditions. There was little variation between the sexes (30.0% in males and 34.3% in females) (Table 7-3).

One third (34.0%) of people with 12-month mental disorders also identified that they had a chronic physical condition. For females, 38.2% of those with 12-month mental disorders had a chronic physical condition compared to 33.2% of females without a mental disorder. For males, 28.5% of those with 12-month mental disorders also had a chronic physical condition compared to 30.3% without a mental disorder.

**Table 7-3: Prevalence of chronic physical conditions in people with 12-month mental disorders by sex**

	Any National Health Priority Area chronic physical condition (%)		
	Males	Females	Persons
Any mental disorder	28.5	38.2	34.0
No mental disorder	30.3	33.2	31.7
<b>Total population</b>	<b>30.0</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>32.2</b>

Mental disorders were more common among the population with chronic physical conditions than those without (28.0% compared to 17.6%) (Table 7-4). This was particularly true for females with 32.9% of those with a chronic physical condition also having 12-month mental disorders compared to 22.1% of males.

**Table 7-4: Age-standardised prevalence of 12-month mental disorders in people with National Health Priority Area (NHPA) chronic physical conditions by sex**

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Persons (%)
Any NHPA chronic physical condition	22.1	32.9	28.0
No NHPA chronic physical condition	16.4	19.0	17.6
<b>Total population</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>22.6</b>	<b>20.3</b>

Note: Total population prevalence differs to that presented elsewhere due to age-standardisation.

#### 7.3.1 Days out of role

The average number of days out of role experienced by people with comorbid mental disorders and chronic physical conditions is shown in Table 7-5. People without a mental disorder or chronic physical condition had one day out of role in the previous 30 days.

People with chronic physical conditions only had 2.5 days out of role. However, people with mental disorders had on average more days out of role, with those with mental disorders only reporting 3.2 days out of role and those with both a mental disorder and a chronic physical condition reporting the greatest number of days out of role (5.5 days) (Table 7-5).

**Table 7-5: Days out of role by comorbidity of 12-month mental disorders and National Health Priority Area (NHPA) chronic physical conditions**

	Days out of role in previous 30 days (mean)
No mental disorder or NHPA chronic physical condition	1.0
Mental disorder only	3.2
NHPA chronic physical condition only	2.5
Mental disorder and NHPA chronic physical condition	5.5
<b>Total population</b>	<b>1.9</b>

