

People who have a serious mental illness live shorter lives

People who have a serious mental health problem like schizophrenia have shorter lives compared to the national average.

A study carried out by researchers at the Institute of Psychiatry (IoP), King's College London showed that women with schizoaffective disorder lived 17.5 years less than the national average, and that the lives of men with schizophrenia were 14.6 years shorter than the national average.

The researchers analysed information about 31,719 people with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, bipolar disorder, substance use disorder or depressive disorders who had been given support and treatment by services run by South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) over a three year period.

During that time, 1,370 people died, a higher proportion than the national average. The analysis showed an overall reduced life expectancy of 12.9 years for men and 11.8 years for women for all diagnoses.

The research team says premature death among people who have serious mental health problems is probably due to a combination of factors. Research has shown that people with serious mental health conditions tend to look after themselves less well, are more likely to smoke, less likely to eat healthy food and take regular exercise. Long-term use of antipsychotics can lead to weight gain and increase the risk of cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

'Most of the differences in survival will be related to 'natural' outcomes such as heart attack, stroke and cancer, rather than deaths from suicide or violence,' said Dr Rob Stewart, who supervised the research.

'The results demonstrate the substantial impact of serious mental illness on life expectancy and highlight the important of developing strategies to prevent premature mortality. We need to improve the general health of people who have mental disorders by making sure they have access to healthcare of the same standard, quality and range as other people, and by developing effective screening programmes.'

The information analysed is held on the Case Register Interactive Search (CRIS) system – a regularly updated database that gives authorised researchers access to the anonymised records of people who use services provided by SLaM. CRIS holds archived information dating back to before 2000 and was set up under the auspices of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Biomedical Research Centre for Mental Health (BRC) run by the Institute of Psychiatry and SLaM. There are currently anonymised records of more than 170,000 people held on the CRIS. 'CRIS is a powerful tool for research to improve health,' said Dr Stewart.

■ *Life expectancy at birth for people with serious mental illness and other major disorders form a secondary mental health care case register in London*, Chin-Kuo Chang, Richard D Hayes, Gayan Perera, Mathew TM Broadbent, Andrea C Fernandes, William E Lee, Mathew Hotopf, Robert Stewart, *PLoS ONE*, May 18, 2011.

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