

Policy brief

Health Policy Institute of Ohio

Mental Health in Ohio

Mental disorders are very common in the United States and internationally. Data from the Global Burden of Disease study, conducted by the World Health Organization, the World Bank, and Harvard University, indicate that mental illness is the second highest burden of disease in established market economies, such as the United States¹. In addition, for those aged 15-44, mental disorders are the leading cause of disability in the United States & Canada².

It is estimated that approximately 25% of American adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a year³.

Serious mental illness is less common, affecting approximately 6% of American adults³.

How do Ohioans fare when it comes to mental disorders? To measure mental health status in Ohio, the Health Policy Institute of Ohio analyzed data from the 2008 Ohio Family Health Survey (OFHS), a complex designed survey that sampled approximately 51,000 Ohio households, excluding institutions. The following brief provides a description of the findings, including a profile of the subpopulations in Ohio with the greatest mental health needs.

MEASURING MENTAL HEALTH STATUS

The 2008 Ohio Family Health Survey ascertained mental health status by asking respondents, "For how many days during the past the 30 days did your mental health condition or emotional problem keep you from doing your work or other usual activities?"

This question was adapted from the BRFSS's "Healthy Days measures," a set of measures which has been used since 1993 by multiple national organizations to identify health trends and disparities and to inform policy decisions⁴.

According to the OFHS, approximately 600,000 Ohioans, ages 18 and over, report 14 or more mentally unhealthy days in the past 30 days.

Furthermore, these healthy days measures have recently been identified by State of the USA/ Institute of Medicine as one of the 20 key indicators of health in the United States⁵.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines "frequent mental distress" as 14 or more mentally unhealthy days and reports the prevalence of this condition as an indicator of health-related quality of life⁴. The Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) has identified 20 or more mentally unhealthy days to be predictive of "severe psychological distress or impairment", and has identified this subpopulation as its primary target for intervention⁶.

Below are descriptive statistics on Ohioans who report 14 or more mentally unhealthy days, in accordance with the CDC's criteria for frequent mental distress. Additionally, this brief includes descriptive statistics on Ohioans who report 20 or more mentally unhealthy days, in accordance with the ODMH's criteria for serious psychological distress. *In general, those who reported experiencing 14 days of distress are statistically similar to those reporting 20 days of distress. For reference, both cut-points are presented.*

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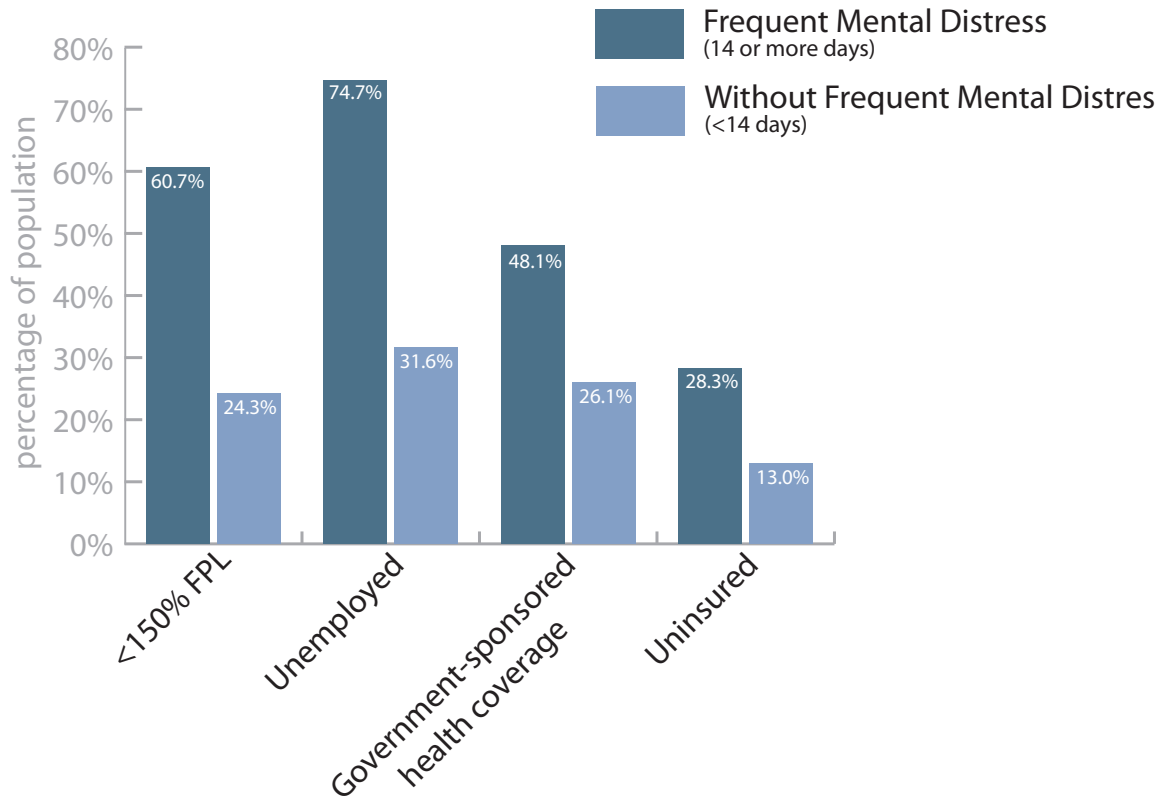
FINDINGS: OHIOANS REPORTING FREQUENT MENTAL DISTRESS (14 or more days)

According to the OFHS, 6.92% of Ohioans (approximately 600,000 people), ages 18 and over, report 14 or more mentally unhealthy days in the past 30 days. Approximately 40% of these persons are between the ages of 35 and 54. Other demographic findings regarding those reporting 14 or more days of mental distress include the following:

- Frequent mental distress is reported slightly more by females than males.
- The majority of persons with frequent mental distress are white.
- More than 70% of persons with frequent mental distress have a high school diploma or less.

The vast majority of Ohioans suffering from frequent mental distress are unemployed (75% or 390,000 individuals) and living in poverty. Approximately 61% (370,000 individuals) of persons with frequent mental distress live below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level, compared to 24% for those without frequent mental distress. Nearly 30% (170,000 individuals) of persons with frequent mental distress are uninsured, while 48% (279,000 individuals) report having government-sponsored health coverage. This compares to an uninsured rate of 13% for those living without frequent mental distress, and a government-sponsored coverage rate of 26%.

Fig. 1
Poverty, Employment, & Insurance Status for those With and Without Frequent Mental Distress



Approximately 11% of persons (28,000 individuals) with frequent mental distress reported needing mental health care but not receiving it. Of those, approximately 70% reported expense and lack of coverage as reasons for not receiving needed mental health care.

FINDINGS: OHIOANS REPORTING SERIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS (20 or more days)

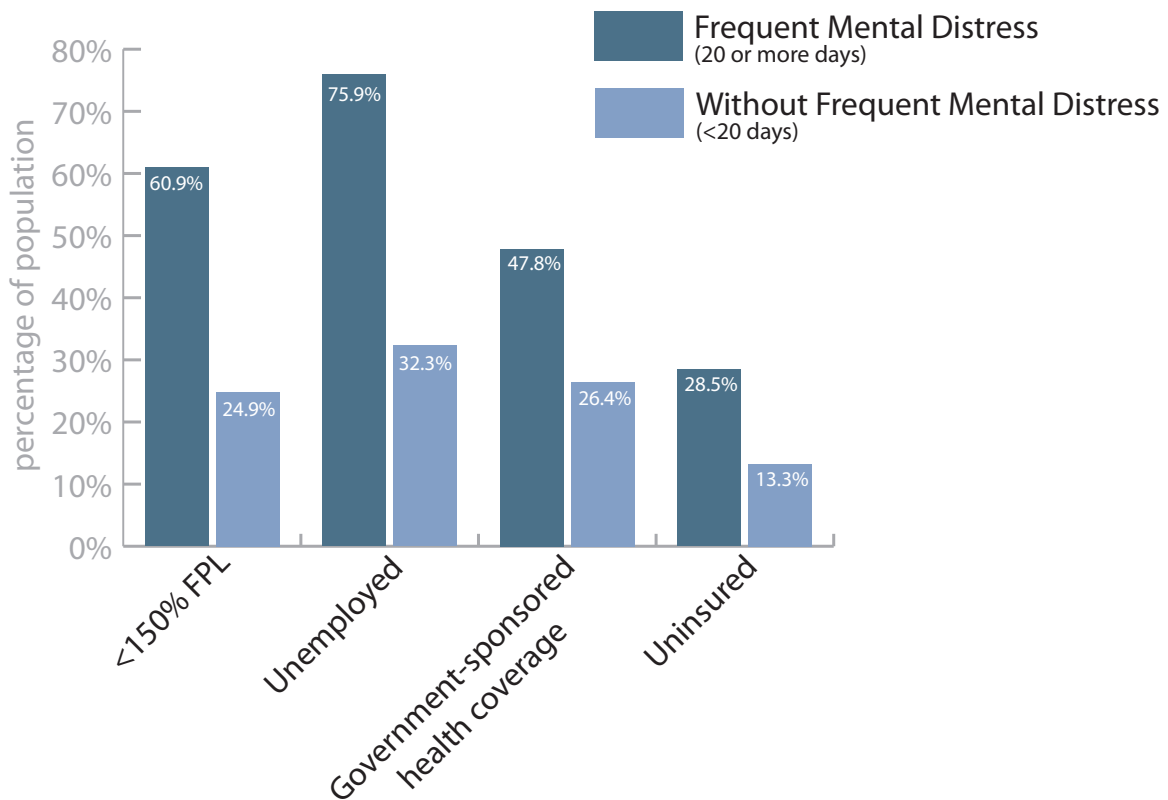
According to the OFHS, 5.38% of Ohioans (approximately 460,000 people), ages 18 and over, report 20 or more mentally unhealthy days in the past 30 days. Approximately 40% of these persons are between the ages of 35 and 54. Other demographic findings regarding those reporting 20 or more days of serious psychological distress include the following:

- Serious psychological distress is reported slightly more by females than males.
- The majority of persons reporting serious psychological distress are white.
- Approximately 70% of persons with serious psychological distress have a high school diploma or less.

The vast majority of Ohioans suffering from serious psychological distress are unemployed (76% or 310,000 individuals) and living in poverty. Approximately 61% (283,000 individuals) of persons with serious psychological distress live below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level, compared to 25% for those without frequent mental distress. Nearly 30% of persons (130,000 individuals) with serious psychological distress are uninsured, while another 48% (225,000 individuals) report having government-sponsored health coverage. This compares to an uninsured rate of 13% for those living without serious psychological distress, and a government-sponsored coverage rate of 26%.

Fig. 2

Poverty, Employment, & Insurance Status for those With and Without Serious Psychological Distress



Approximately 11% of persons (21,000 individuals) with serious psychological distress reported needing mental health care but not receiving it. Of those, 70% reported expense and lack of coverage as

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reasons for not receiving needed mental health care.

SUMMARY

This brief highlights that the demographics between those with frequent mental distress (as defined by the CDC) and those with serious psychological distress (as defined by ODMH) are similar. Regardless of how mental illness is defined, it is clear that the majority of persons experiencing significant mental distress live in poverty, are unemployed, and are either uninsured or covered by government programs. Despite legislation prohibiting discrimination in the coverage of diagnosis, care, and treatment of biologically-based mental illnesses⁸, access to care for those with mental illness remains a problem. More than 1 in 10 Ohioans with mental distress are not receiving the mental health care they need.

This brief illustrates the continued need for mental health interventions in Ohio. Based on the findings, such interventions should target impoverished communities where persons with mental illness are concentrated.

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