

PROFILE 2

Mental Health Problems in Alberta's Workforce

The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce: 2009 assessed 2817 employed adults for addiction and mental health problems. For the purposes of this document, the term mental health disorder is used to describe diagnosable mental illnesses, while mental health problems is used to encapsulate all mental health issues including related features such as hopelessness and suicidal behaviours.

Mental Health Disorders

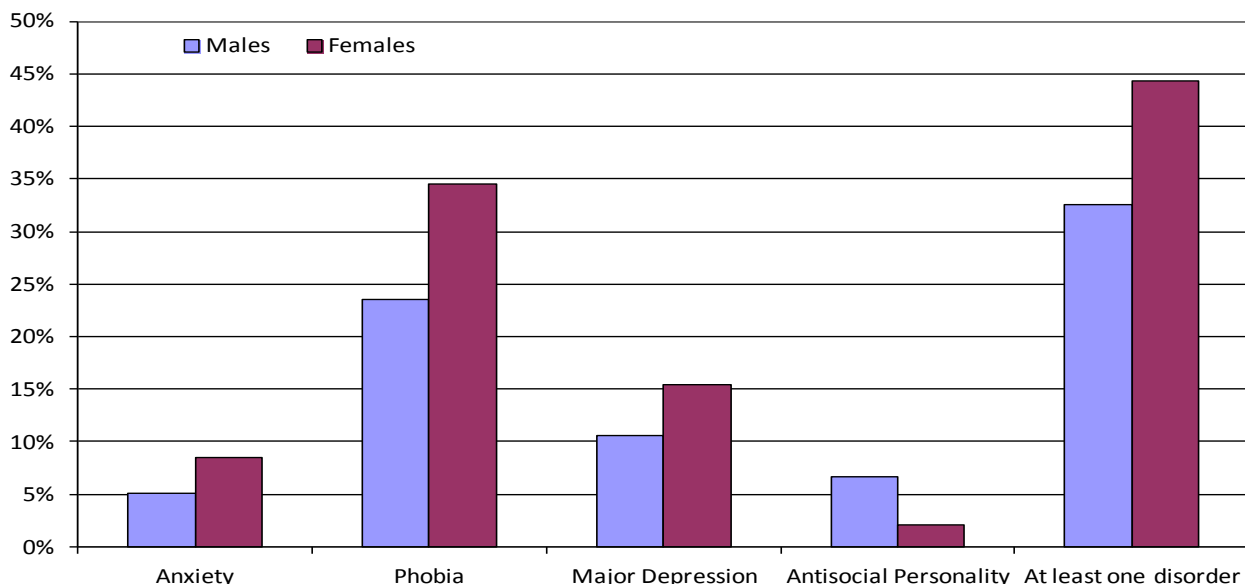
The categories of diagnosable mental health disorders investigated in the workforce survey are described below.

Anxiety	Frightened, anxious, very uneasy when most would be unafraid (3+ spells)
Phobia	Agoraphobia, social phobia, claustrophobia
Major Depression	Depressed and/or loss of interest for 2 weeks, plus other symptoms
Antisocial Personality	Irresponsibility, lawbreaking, no remorse, lying, fighting, endangering (3+ items)
At least one disorder	The presence of at least one mental health disorder.

How many individuals in dealt with mental health disorders in 2009?

Almost half of the females (44%) and a third (33%) of the males employed in Alberta suffered from at least one mental health disorder at some point in their life. Phobias were most common irrespective of gender. With the exception of antisocial personality disorder, females had a greater lifetime prevalence of mental health disorders relative to males (see Figure 1). There were no significant differences in prevalence rates across the five health zones.

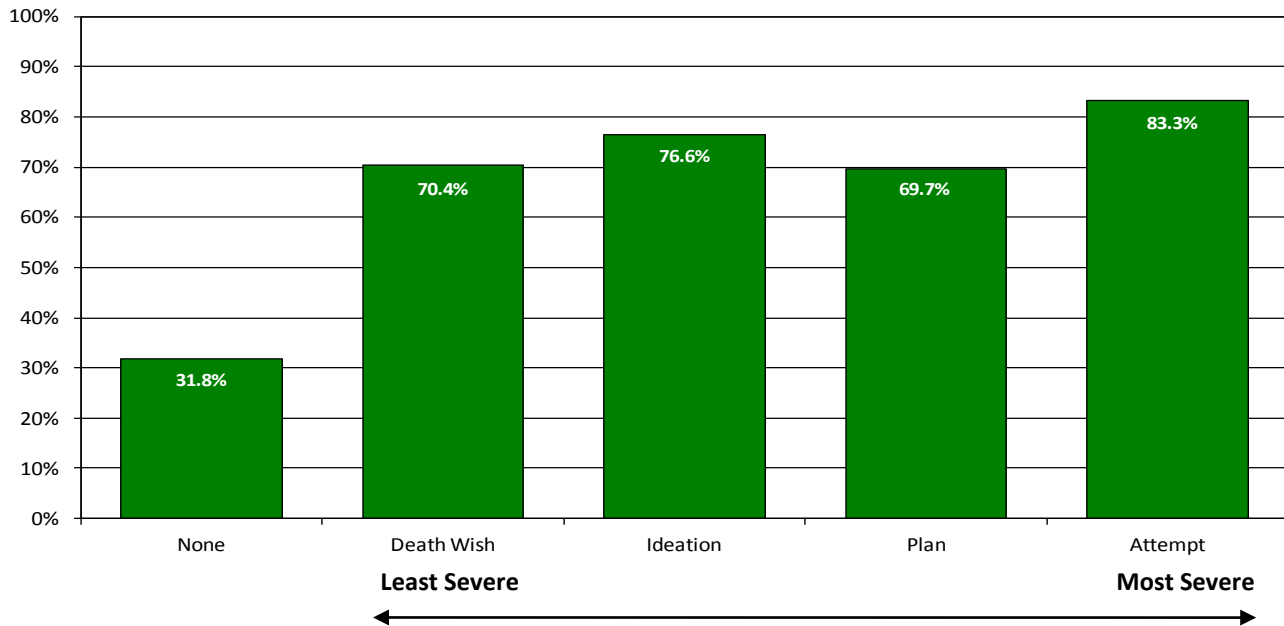
Figure 1: Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders in Alberta



What do the other mental health indicators tell us?

Two other measures of mental health were included: hopelessness and suicidal behaviour (which included death wish, ideation, plan and attempt). Twenty-six percent of the sample identified feeling hopeless for a period of time in their life (females = 29%; males = 23%), while 16% of the sample (females = 19%; males = 12%) had exhibited suicidal behaviours over their lifespan. Although only a small number of workers admitted to experiencing suicidal tendencies, the impact of such behaviours on their mental health was severe. As shown in Figure 2, the lifetime prevalence of mental health disorders increased as a function of the severity of suicidal behaviours, highest in those with a prior suicide attempt.

Figure 2: Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders According to the Intensity of Suicidal Behaviour



Summary

- The prevalence of mental health disorders in Alberta workers is high; 44% of employed females and 33% of employed males have suffered from a mental health disorder over their lifespan.
- On average, working females experienced mental health problems more often than employed males.
- Although the frequency of suicidal behaviours was relatively low, their impact on mental health was substantial. More than 70% of individuals who had struggled with suicidal thoughts and/or actions met criteria for a mental health disorder at some point in their life.

Given its elevated prevalence and strong association to suicide, mental health disorders in the workplace require attention. Mental health problems often co-occur with addictive behaviours (see Profile 3) and are reported more frequently in certain lines of work (see Profile 5), highlighting additional considerations for treatment-related service planning. Increasing prevention and health promotion activities in the workplace and having Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) in place to help address these issues are important components to maintaining a healthy workforce.

For a link to the full report, *The Alberta Survey of Addictive Behaviours and Mental Health in the Workforce: 2009*, visit: <http://ihe.ca/publications/library/2011/the-alberta-survey-of-addictive-behaviours-and-mental-health-in-the-workforce-2009/>

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