



Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE CALIFORNIA WOMEN'S HEALTH SURVEY

Mental disorders such as depression are among the leading causes of poor health worldwide.¹ According to the 2000 American Community Survey, 22 percent of women in the United States had a disability, and nearly one quarter of these women had a mental disability. Disability type is not mutually exclusive; the majority of women with a mental disability cited another type of disability as well (e.g., physical or sensory).² For some, a mental health condition may be the primary disabling condition, while for others a mental health condition occurs secondary to a physical disability.

The 2007 California Women's Health Survey (CWSH) assessed the overall

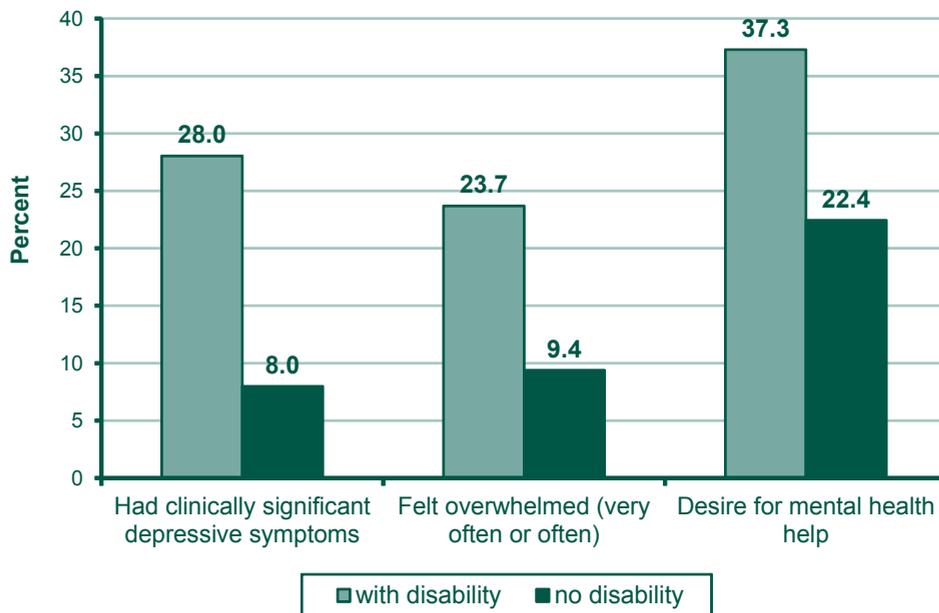
increase in mental health needs among women with disabilities. These women were identified on the CWSH by a "Yes" response to either of two questions: (1) "Do you now have any health problem that requires you to use special equipment, such as a cane, a wheel chair, a special bed, or a special telephone?" and (2) "Are you limited in any way in any activities because of a physical, mental, or emotional problem?" The level of depressive symptoms was measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ), a screening tool designed to identify the presence of depression.³ Responses were scored to create a total PHQ score, with a value of ten or greater identifying clinically significant depressive symptoms.

Mental Health Needs Among California Women With Disabilities, 2007

California Department of Public Health
Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control (EPIC) Branch
Living Healthy with a Disability Program

Public Health Message:
Women with a disability are more likely than women without disabilities to face a variety of mental health problems, including increased prevalence of depressive symptoms, likelihood of feeling overwhelmed, and the need for professional mental health help for personal problems. It is important that treatment and prevention activities are available, accessible, and affordable for people with disabilities, and that policies dealing with mental health include this vulnerable population.

Figure 1 **Mental Health Needs Among California Women, by Disability Status, 2007**



Source: California Women's Health Survey, 2007

Mental Health Needs Among California Women With Disabilities, 2007

California Department of Public Health
Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control (EPIC) Branch
Living Healthy with a Disability Program

Feeling overwhelmed was measured by the question: “*In the past 30 days, how often have you felt problems were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?*” A desire for mental health help was measured by the question: “*In the past 12 months did you ever want help with personal or family problems from a mental health professional or religious or spiritual leader?*” Responses were weighted in these analyses by age and race/ethnicity to reflect the 2000 California adult female population.

In 2007, 22.3 percent of CWHS respondents reported having a disability. Women with disabilities had a higher prevalence of the mental health issues examined below.⁴ Compared with women without a disability, women with disabilities (see Figure 1):

- Were more than three times as likely to report depressive symptoms (28.0 percent versus 8.0 percent),
- Had higher PHQ scores, indicating a greater severity level of depressive symptoms (mean score of 6.9 versus 3.5),
- Were more than twice as likely to feel overwhelmed often or very often (23.7 percent versus 9.4 percent),

- Were more likely to need mental health help for personal problems (37.3 percent versus 22.4 percent). Interestingly, there was no difference in the percentage of women who received help (68.3 percent of disabled women received the help they needed, compared to 68.0 percent of women without disabilities).

Disability and mental health problems are often found concurrently and it is not possible here to determine whether the mental health issues described are the primary cause of disability or a consequence of another disabling condition. It is clear, however, that there is a significant need for help with mental health issues among women with a disability.

- 1 World Health Organization. *The Global Burden of Disease: 2004 Update*. Switzerland; World Health Organization; 2008.
- 2 Waldrop J. Stern SM. *Disability Status: 2000*. Census 2000 Brief. Washington, DC; US Census Bureau; March 2003.
- 3 Kroenke K, Spitzer RL. The PHQ-9: A new depression diagnostic and severity measure. *Psychiatr Ann*. 2002;32(9):1-7.
- 4 All comparisons reported here are statistically significant at $p < 0.0001$.

Submitted by: Julie Cross Riedel, Ph.D., California Department of Public Health, Epidemiology and Prevention for Injury Control (EPIC) Branch, Living Healthy with a Disability Program, (916) 552-9851, Julie.CrossRiedel@cdph.ca.gov