

Physical ills often plague people with schizophrenia, bipolar

April 23 2024, by Dennis Thompson

Severe mental illness can contribute to a decline in a person's physical health, with many chronic conditions slowly eroding their wellness, a new review finds.

People with [schizophrenia](#) or bipolar disorder are more than twice as likely to have multiple chronic health problems such as [heart disease](#) or diabetes, researchers reported recently in [The Lancet Psychiatry](#) journal.

In fact, it's more likely for a patient with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder to have a variety of physical ailments than to have more than one mental disorder, researchers discovered.

"These results attest to the clinical complexity many people with severe mental illness face in relation to burden of chronic disease," concluded the research team led by Sean Halstead, a doctoral student with the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia.

For the new review, researchers pooled data from 82 prior studies of people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, winding up with a group of more than 1.6 million people with one of those mental illnesses. They compared those patients against data on more than 13 million people with neither mental disorder.

Overall, 25% of people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder had two or more physical health problems, while 13% had three or more ailments, results show.

By comparison, only 14% had two or more psychiatric problems.

Estimates show people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder are 2.4 times more likely than mentally healthy people to have two or more physical ailments, researchers found.

The chronic disease burden was even higher in [young adults](#). People 40 and under had four times the odds of physical health problems.

Multiple factors likely contribute to the poor physical health of people with a serious mental disorder, researchers said. These include genetics, lifestyle choices and side effects from medication they take for their mental health problems.

Further, these physical problems are likely why people with schizophrenia and [bipolar disorder](#) are more likely to die at a younger age, the researchers added.

More information: Sean Halstead et al, Prevalence of multimorbidity in people with and without severe mental illness: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366\(24\)00091-9](#)

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [mental health](#).

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