



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on January 23, 2012

Report: Five Percent of Americans Are Severely Mentally Ill

The federal [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) (SAMHSA) has again found that tens of millions of Americans are, in a word, crazy, and that women are crazier than men.

The study also found that drug and alcohol abuse was higher among the mentally ill.

Results of Survey

The number of mentally ill Americans is shocking if the federal statistics paint a true picture.

[According to](#) SAMHSA, "In 2010, there were an estimated 45.9 million adults aged 18 or older in the United States with any mental illness (AMI) in the past year. This represents 20.0 percent of all adults in this country."

But more shocking is the number of Americans with serious mental illness. That figure is five percent, or 11.4 million adults.

The survey [also reported](#) that "women 18 or older were more likely than men aged 18 or older to have past year AMI (23.0 vs. 16.8 percent) and SMI (6.5 vs. 3.4 percent)." So women are twice as likely to suffer a severe breakdown than men.

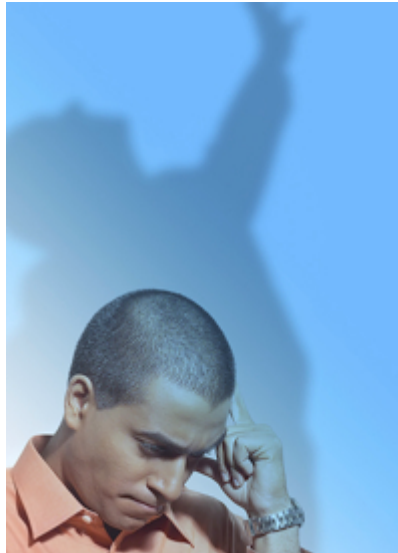
Millions of Americans also think suicidal thoughts. About 8.7 million, or 3.8 percent of the population, entertained such thoughts in 2010, the survey found. And 1.1 percent, or 2.5 million adults, planned suicide in 2010, while 1.1 million, or 0.5 percent, actually tried killing themselves.

"Mental illness is a significant public health problem in itself, but also because it is associated with chronic medical diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and cancer, as well as several risk behaviors including physical inactivity, smoking, excessive drinking, and insufficient sleep," said Ileana Arias, principal deputy director of Centers for Disease Control, [according to](#) a news release. "Today's report issued by SAMHSA provides further evidence that we need to continue efforts to monitor levels of mental illness in the United States in order to effectively prevent this important public health problem and its negative impact on total health."

Other Numbers

Other numbers in the survey don't reflect well upon the mental health of Americans, either.

Nearly 14 percent of adults, some 31.3 million Americans, sought "mental health services" in 2010, the report said. Of the nearly 46 million Americans SAMHSA believes are afflicted with some mental illness, about 18 million, or 39.2 percent, sought mental healthcare. Of the 11.4 million severely mentally ill,





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almost 61 percent, or 6.9 million, sought treatment.

As well, the [report said](#), “among the 45.9 million adults aged 18 or older with AMI in the past year, 20.0 percent (9.2 million adults) met criteria for substance dependence or abuse in that period compared with 6.1 percent (11.2 million adults) among those who did not have mental illness in the past year. Among the 11.4 million adults aged 18 or older with SMI in the past year, 25.2 percent also had past year substance dependence or abuse compared with 6.1 percent of adults who did not have mental illness.”

Beyond that, 1.9 million Americans age 12-17 had a major depressive episode in 2010, the survey found. Of those who experienced that affliction, “37.2 percent used illicit drugs in the past year, compared with 17.8 percent among youths who did not have past year MDE.”

The upshot is, mental illness is a good predictor of either alcoholism or illicit drug use.

Unsurprisingly, 12.2 percent of Americans age 12-17, or 2.9 million, sought mental health counseling. “The most common reason for receiving specialty mental health services among youths was feeling depressed (47.6 percent),” the [report said](#).

Numbers Valid?

The *Washington Post* interviewed two headshrinkers who don’t believe the numbers imply that Americans are losing their marbles.

The high numbers, Prof. Allen Frances [told the Post](#), “should be taken as upper limits only. I am skeptical that rates this high make sense.”

Another prominent skull doctor, [Daniel J. Carlat](#), said the figures aren’t quite right in the impression they give. “There is a kind of alarmist quality to these reports,” [he told the Post](#). “There is a stigma about ‘mental illness’ that as soon as you hear the term people assume that it’s something quite severe. The nuances of this type of data tend to be lost on people,” he said. He added, however, that he doesn’t doubt that five percent of the population have a serious mental disorder.

All Doped Up

Yet if 20 percent of Americans have suffered some sort of mental illness in the last year, the number of Americans taking anti-depressants is more alarming, given that “mental illness” has a rather broad definition for some.

[According to the latest figures](#) from the Centers for Disease Control, some 11 percent of Americans age 12 and older are ingesting anti-depressants, [an increase of](#) 400 percent in the last 20 years — and women are much more likely to take antidepressants than men.

Oddly, however, the drugs don’t seem to be helping. As [The New American reported](#) in 2009, the suicide rate for Americans increased 16 percent between 1999 and 2009.

Whether the drugs are causing Americans to commit suicide is a good question. An even better one is whether they inspired some of the mass school shootings in the last decade. A number of the school shooters were taking antidepressants when they embarked on their deadly rampages.

[Kipland P. Kinkel](#), who killed two and injured 25 when he opened fire at [Thurston High](#) in Springfield, Oregon in 1998, [was taking Prozac](#). [So was Jeff Weise, who murdered](#) nine in Red Lake, Minnesota, including five students at the high school and four others, including his grandfather, in 2005.



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The two most notorious school shooters also took antidepressants. [Eric Harris](#), one of the two mass murderers at [Columbine High School](#) in Colorado, [was taking Luvox](#). He and his partner, Dylan Klebold, murdered 12 kids and a teacher in 1999 before committing suicide.

[Cho Seung-Hui](#), the lunatic [Korean immigrant](#) who [shot up Virginia Tech](#) a few years ago, had a prescription for [Prozac](#), another dangerous drug, but it is unclear whether he was taking the drug when he killed 32 and injured 25 that awful April day in 2007.

Nuts in Congress

An important question one might ask, based on the [SAMHSA's survey](#), is how many Congressman and Senators need a check up from the neck up.

If the percentages hold firm across all sectors of society, then at least 107 of this country's 535 legislators suffered some form of mental illness in 2010.

Even worse, about 27 of them may well belong in a mental institution.

Then again, given the unique personality of an individual who seeks high office, along with the stress of such a profession, Congress may well have a much higher rate of mental illness than the general population.



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