**Serious mental illness shortens lives**

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People suffering serious mental illness can expect to live up to 18 years less than the national average, according to the latest research from King’s Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) for Mental Health.

The research is the first to examine life expectancy for people with specific mental illnesses in the UK and shows that women with schizoaffective disorder and men with schizophrenia are among those most affected, with a reduced life expectancy of 17.5 years and 14.6 years respectively.

Published in the journal PLoS One, the study looked at people suffering bipolar disorder, depressive disorders, schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia and people treated for substance misuse.

The findings demonstrate the need for more assertive interventions and regular physical health assessments to prevent premature death among these vulnerable groups.

Premature mortality among people with mental disorders most likely arises from a combination of factors including social disadvantage, long-term antipsychotic drug use and higher-risk lifestyles.

For example, people with serious mental health conditions tend to look after themselves less well and are less likely to make the lifestyle changes, such as stopping smoking, eating well and exercising, considered necessary to stay fit and healthy.

Lead author and BRC researcher Dr Robert Stewart said, ‘These results show the enormous impact mental health conditions can have on general health and survival. The effects we see here are stronger than well known risk factors like smoking, obesity or diabetes.

‘Most of the differences in survival will be related to 'natural' outcomes such as heart attack, stroke and cancer, rather than deaths from suicide or violence.

We need to improve the general health of people suffering from mental disorders by making sure they have access to healthcare of the same standard, quality and range as other people, and by developing effective screening programmes.’

The findings have been made possible due to what is believed to be the worlds only research database (case register) to be hooked up to anonymised data from ‘live’ electronic patient records.

The BRC is based at King’s College London and South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) – Europe’s largest provider of mental health services.

SLaM has had electronic patient records since 2006 and researchers from the BRC can search and retrieve anonymised data from over 170,000 records at the touch of a button. In this study, data from over 30,000 records was extracted. The large number of cases, accuracy and ‘up-to-date’ data used are key strengths of this study.

King’s and SLaM are part of the King’s Health Partners (KHP) Academic Health Sciences Centre and KHP’s Professor Matthew Hotopf added: ‘These findings are particularly relevant for the work of King's Health Partners, where colleagues from acute medicine and mental health are working together to develop a model of "whole person care"’.

The BRC works to accelerate the translation of fundamental biomedical research into clinical practice for patient benefit. Funding for both the BRC and CRIS is provided by National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), and through Guy’s and St Thomas’ Trustees and SLaM Trustees.

'[Life Expectancy at Birth for People with Serious Mental Illness and Other Major Disorders from a Secondary Mental Health Care Case Register in London'](http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0019590) – Stewart et al is published in PLoS ONE.

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