



Key insights from the APMS 2023/4

OVERVIEW

The Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) is a national survey of mental health among adults living in England. Its purpose is to measure the prevalence of mental health conditions, track trends over time, and assess access to treatment. To test for probable cases of bipolar, the APMS used the Mood Disorder Questionnaire (MDQ).

ABOUT THE DATA

- Over **6,000 adults** (16+) took part in the latest APMS
- The **sample is limited** but it's still the best data we have for understanding the prevalence of treated and untreated mental health conditions in England
- The MDQ that assesses prevalence is imperfect but does allow for **comparisons across surveys**
- The data presented is only for those who have screened positive for bipolar
- The previous APMS was conducted in 2014, meaning we can compare how diagnosis and treatment has changed over the past **10 years**

FINDINGS

The APMS findings suggest the current system is not meeting the needs of people with bipolar. Under-diagnosis and inadequate access to specialist treatment may be contributing to the rising unemployment and widening inequalities for those who test positive for probable bipolar.

Prevalence

Bipolar is the most common severe mental illness

- prevalence overall has remained **stable** at approximately 2% of the adult population
- this is **consistent** with the 2014 findings and global studies
- there are over 890,000 people with bipolar in England, over a million UK-wide
- prevalence remains significantly **higher amongst young people** than older people, partly due to limitations of the MDQ and because people with bipolar die 10-15 years younger, on average

Diagnosis and treatment

There has been a significant shift away from specialist treatment for bipolar to generic mental health support

- only 17.8% of those tested positive for probable bipolar had a professional diagnosis, indicating **significant underdiagnosis**
- the percentage of people receiving **no treatment** has decreased from 59.2% to 50%
- however, the percentage of people receiving **bipolar-specific medication** has dropped from 14.5% to 5.1%
- the percentage of individuals with bipolar accessing **psychological therapies** has risen from 1.6% to 8.7%, compared with 1.2-1.6% in the general population

Impact

People who tested positive for probable bipolar have experienced a disproportionate leap in unemployment and are more likely to live in the most deprived areas of England

- **unemployment** has doubled for people with bipolar, rising from 3.9% in 2014 to 9% in 2024
- people who tested positive are twice as high in the most deprived areas (3.6%) than the least deprived (1.36%)
- the link between bipolar and **deprivation** has become more pronounced since 2014