

3

Mental illness

One in five Thais suffers from some sort of mental illness. The most common illnesses are depression and anxiety disorder. Stress is also a serious mental health problem.

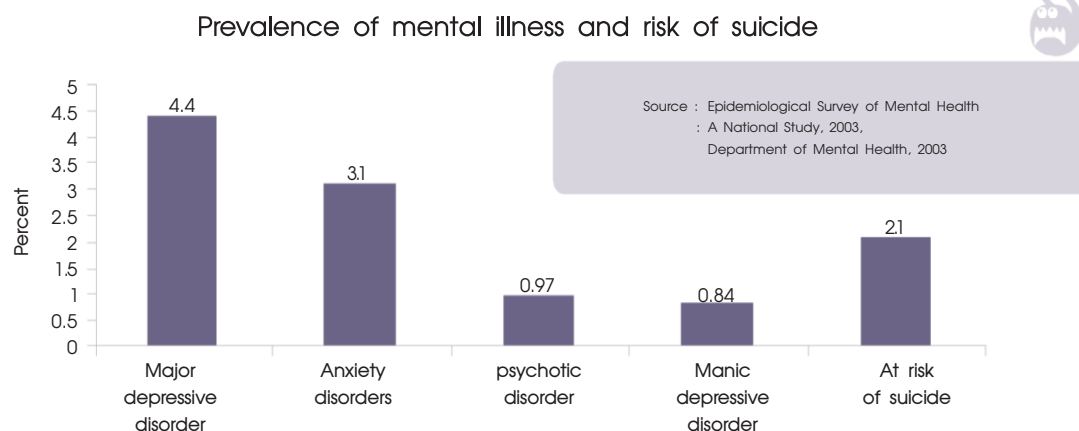
Prepared by Dr. Taweasin Visanuyothin, Ministry of Public Health

'The mind is the master and the body the slave' is an insightful and very old Thai expression. However, misunderstanding and prejudice about mental illness mean that many people do not recognize the warning signs.

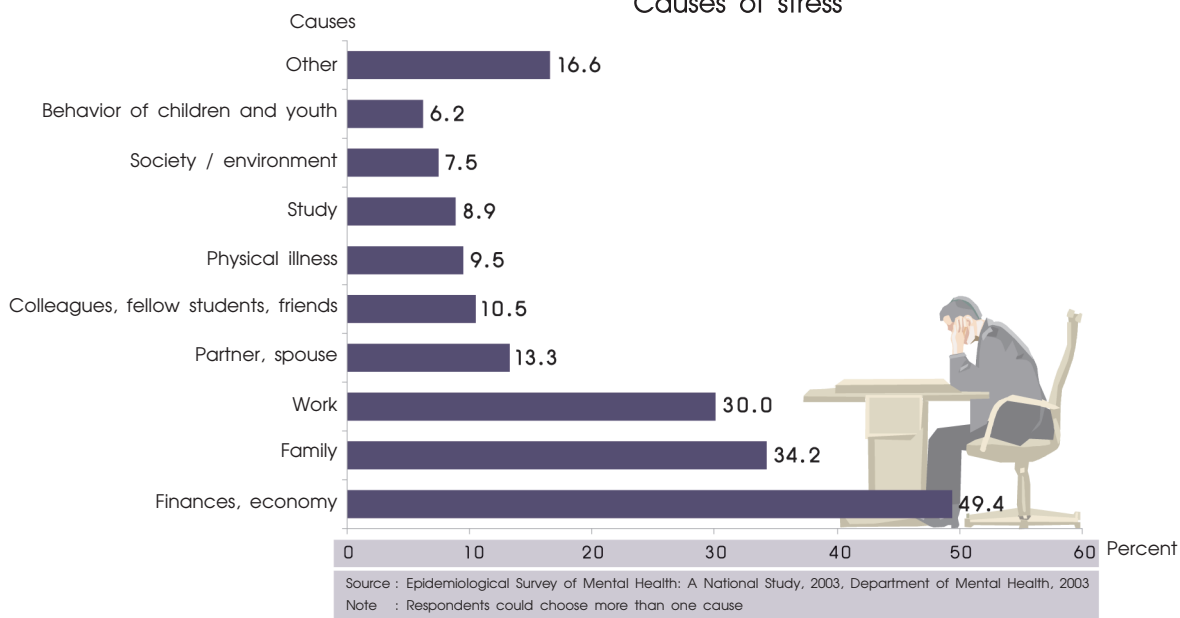
The National Survey of the Prevalence of Mental Illness in 2003 found that one in five people aged 15 to 59 was experiencing some kind of mental illness. The illnesses included Major depressive disorder, anxiety disorder, psychotic disorder, and Manic depressive disorder. Altogether, 1.8 million Thais have one or more symptoms of depression. Prevalence rates are highest in the Northeast. Women have higher rates of major depressive disorder than men in all parts of the country. Approximately 1.3 million people have an anxiety or emotional disorder. Over 800,000 people are at risk of suicide.

Stress is another important mental health problem. Eight percent of Thais experience severe stress. Everyone faces stress of some kind. A small amount is healthy, and can stimulate mental and physical activity. However, excessive amounts can lead to mental health problems. Sources of stress include problems with finances, family, and work. The Survey of Mental Health among Employees at Workplaces found that 23.9% of employees suffered from major stress, and 32.8% suffered from depression.

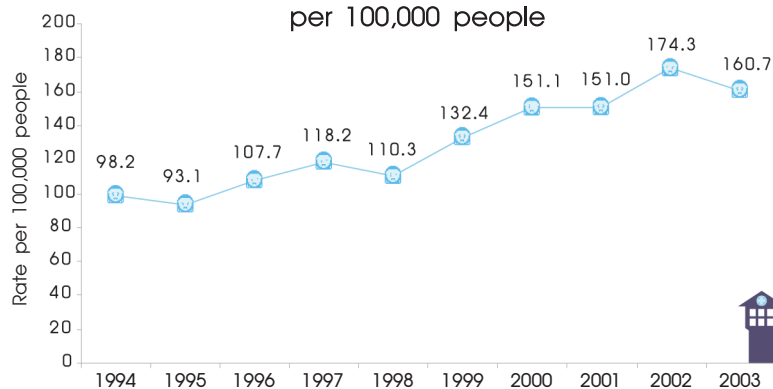
The main ways to reduce the prevalence of mental illness are providing people with information, raising awareness, promoting acceptance, and reducing prejudice. People who have received treatment for mental illness should not be stigmatised, but should be welcomed as members of the community.



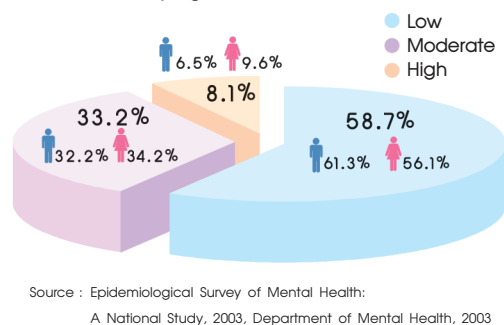
Causes of stress



Hospital admissions for mental illnesses per 100,000 people



Level of stress reported in survey, by gender 2003



Prevalence of major depressive disorder in Thailand, by region

