

HEALTH REPORT

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MEDIA RELEASE

Silent epidemic of depression associated with arthritis *Survey shows one-in-five has depression*

One-in-five arthritis patients reporting depression in a national survey released today could be just the tip of the iceberg of the impact of the arthritis on mental health, experts say.

National polling conducted for Arthritis Australia and the Pfizer Australia Health Report shows that arthritis can result in marked loss of confidence and self-esteem, anxiety and depression.

"The snowballing affect of depression which can cause a range of personal issues has the potential to make the lives of a large number of people with arthritis very difficult," rheumatologist and vice president of Arthritis Australia, Dr Mona Marabani said.

Two-thirds of Australians with arthritis say their condition has affected their emotional wellbeing.

One-in-three surveyed suffered anxiety related to their condition, and another one-in-three said it has caused them to lose confidence.

"Feeling frustrated, angry, scared or even depressed can be common reactions to having arthritis," Dr Marabani said.

"Too often people don't discuss these problems with their family or doctor. Acknowledging these feelings is the first step - then they need to seek advice and support.

"Depression is an illness, so if you feel depressed the sooner you seek treatment, the sooner you will find relief. Support is also available from the State and Territory offices of Arthritis Australia."

One-third of people with arthritis surveyed said they had also caused family and friends stress because of their condition. Of these, around half felt the stress caused was "moderate" or "a lot".

When asked about how concerned were people that their arthritis would affect their health as they became older, one third of arthritis patients were either "extremely worried" or "very worried". Women were less concerned than men despite more women having arthritis.

Impact in the workplace

The survey also has significant implications for employers with more than half (56 percent) of people with arthritis saying they have experienced difficulties in the workplace because of their condition.

Nearly 80 percent of those people reported their ability to perform tasks effectively had been reduced.

Sixteen percent reported that their condition had forced them to take time off, and almost as many (15 percent) felt that having arthritis had reduced their employment opportunities.

"These results show that arthritis has a significant negative impact on activity in the workplace," Dr Marabani said.

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Who is affected?

Of the more than 1500 people responding, 24 percent reported having arthritis with the incidence 10 percent higher among women.

People aged over 50 were three times more likely to have the condition. Significant numbers of people in the 31-50 age group (13 percent) reported having arthritis.

Fourteen percent of survey respondents diagnosed with arthritis report that they first noticed the condition between the ages of 30 and 39.

Another 21 percent say onset was between 40 and 49 and 26 percent between 50 and 59.

Dr Marabani said this highlighted that arthritis was not just an indication of aging and could occur in significant numbers of younger people.

"Of those with arthritis in the survey, 66% report they have osteoarthritis and 20% report they have rheumatoid arthritis, which are the most common forms of the condition," she said.

Copies of the Pfizer Australia Health Report can be obtained from the website www.healthreport.com.au or by calling 1800 675 229.

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Issued on behalf of Arthritis Australia and Pfizer Australia by Hill & Knowlton.

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Note to editors:

Designed by Arthritis Australia, the study was a self-completion survey involving 1623 people (living in 805 households) aged 16 years and over, conducted by independent consultant Stollznow Research. Participants were recruited by telephone and the surveys were completed in April 2004. Arthritis Australia received no funding as part of this project. Pfizer Australia is a supporter of the Arthritis Australia Community Chest that is administered by Medicines Australia under their Community Care Program.