



Substance Use and Mental Health

What is a Co-occurring or Concurrent Disorder?

Substance Use and Mental Health Disorders very often co-exist. When these disorders exist at the same time for an individual, that person is said to have a *co-occurring* or a *concurrent disorder*. Sometimes this combination of problems is referred to as *dual diagnosis, dual disorder, or comorbidity*.

Co-occurring disorder combinations are varied and cover a wide range of specific disorder combinations. For information on these specific disorders, consult the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM IV(TR)]. This information is available online at <http://www.behavenet.com/capsules/disorders/dsm4TRclassification.htm>.

Health Canada, in conjunction with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Ontario, published a best practices paper on Concurrent Disorders in 2002 that lists categories of disorder combinations as well as assessment and treatment tips. This paper is available online at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hecs-sesc/cds/pdf/concurrentbestpractice.pdf>.

How Common are Co-occurring Disorders?

According to Health Canada (2002), about half of all adults with a severe mental illness will at some time or another experience a co-occurring substance use disorder, and at any given point in time, half of those will have an active concurrent disorder. Conversely, several studies show that we should expect about half of all adults with a substance use disorder to also have a co-existing mental health problem.

What Health Risks are Associated with Comorbidity?

According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2002)¹, when compared with people who have a mental health problem alone, people with dual diagnosis are more likely to have:

- *Increased likelihood of suicide*
- *More severe mental health problems*
- *Homelessness and unstable housing*
- *Increased risk of being violent*
- *Increased risk of victimization*
- *Increased risk for HIV infection*
- *More contact with the criminal justice system*

¹ <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/cru/complete/ddipPracManual.pdf>

What is the Relationship between these Disorders?

The relationship is complex and varies from individual to individual. The literature commonly describes four types of inter-relationships:

- *A primary psychiatric illness may precipitate or lead to substance misuse*
- *Use of substances may make the mental health problem worse or alter its course*
- *Intoxication and/or substance dependence may lead to psychiatric symptoms*
- *Substance misuse and/or withdrawal may lead to psychiatric symptoms or illnesses*

There is a range of factors that may make some people more vulnerable to either or both problems. These include genetic make up, environment and behaviour. The triggers are diverse and may include a range of adverse or traumatic life events such as homelessness, relationship breakdown or other significant personal loss.

What services are available to help people with co-occurring disorders?

The evolving consensus around the world is that services for those with co-occurring disorders need to be better integrated and that all mental health and addiction programs need to be both welcoming and capable of ensuring that these individuals are able to access appropriate services regardless of where they enter the system.

A Co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders Initiative (CODI) was set up in Manitoba in 2002. The goal of this project is to create a coordinated mental health and addiction service delivery system that is able to provide universally accessible, welcoming, and integrated services for persons with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. The core principle of the project is that there should be "no wrong door" regardless of where people enter the mental health or addiction service system; every service should be welcoming and able to facilitate access to the most appropriate service available. CODI began in Winnipeg as a joint undertaking of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, and Manitoba Health and now is being implemented across all eleven regional health areas. This ambitious multi-sectoral, province-wide system change project will likely take years to fully realize its goal. Services for individuals with co-occurring disorders are, however, already significantly better. Further information on this initiative can be found online at <http://www.afm.mb.ca/codi.html>.

General information on mental health and addiction services available in your area can be obtained by calling:

- Your Regional Health Authority
- Your local *Addictions Foundation of Manitoba* office:
 - Winnipeg - 1-204-944-6200
 - West Region - 1-866-767-3838
 - North Region - 1-866-291-7774
 - Province-wide Library Services 1-204-944-6233
- Area service guides are also available online at <http://www.mherc.mb.ca/printables.html> or <http://www.cmhamanitoba.mb.ca/go.aspx?tabid=4>