
NIMH Study Finds One In Five Have Disorders

The early results of a major new epidemiologic survey of the mental health of Americans suggest that about 19 percent have some recognizable disorder. The survey, which began in 1980, was directed by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in conjunction with investigators from Baltimore, St. Louis, and New Haven. Data from two other major sites for the survey, Los Angeles and North Carolina, are still being analyzed and did not figure into the current picture.

The study, which has cost \$15 million and is far from complete, is the first to establish a detailed profile of mental disorders in the United States, according to psychiatrist Darrel Regier of NIMH who directed the study. He announced the findings during a press conference, held at the National Institutes of Health, that coincided with their publication in the October issue of *Archives of General Psychiatry*. The data already are changing some views about the incidence of certain disorders within the population and undoubtedly will lead to a reassessment of how to deal with those problems.

For example, the study found that the rate of mental disorders among women is roughly equal to that in men. The established but apparently incorrect view was that the rate for women was higher. The distribution of particular disorders varies considerably between the sexes, with women more often afflicted with depression and phobias, and men with a greater tendency toward "antisocial personality," as well as disorders related to drug and alcohol abuse. People who are under 45 years of age have a rate of mental disorders roughly twice that of people over 45. The study also shows there is no "major differential" between blacks and whites in the general incidence of mental disorders. A future component of the survey will examine mental disorder rates within the U.S. Spanish-speaking population, the rural populace, and among institutionalized patients.

The study revealed that only a small fraction of the population—roughly 7 percent—identified as having mental

disorders actually sought or received treatment for them. And only half of those who received treatment went to specialists. In noting these figures, Regier says, "It is inconceivable that specialists in the mental health care system could absorb the 19 percent" of Americans that the study indicates have a diagnosable mental disorder. Such estimates raise questions about how to reshape the U.S. mental health care delivery system.

The NIMH study was based on a door-to-door survey that was carefully designed to allow scientists to try to replicate their findings and to do long-term follow-ups to see how the rate of disorders changes. Although the survey is not "representative of the entire population," Regier says, "I am confident [it contains] the best diagnostic data on mental health disorders in the U.S."—JEFFREY L. FOX

WIPP in Good Shape Says Academy

Progress in building the nation's first permanent geological repository for transuranic (intermediate level) nuclear wastes may be facilitated by the latest review from a panel of the National Research Council, which has been monitoring the project since 1978.

Work on the billion-dollar Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), which is to be buried in New Mexico's thick rock salt formations, "has been carried out with a high degree of professional competence," says the report, entitled "Review of the Scientific and Technical Criteria for the WIPP."

The panel, headed by Frank L. Parker of Vanderbilt University, made various recommendations, including further research on the effects of the flow of contaminated brine through permeable formations. But on the whole it thought everything looked very stable, and so safe that "simplifications in design may be justified."

Staff director John T. Holloway adds that the 10-year-old project has benefited from the Department of Energy's growing political finesse. The project has been "much less ham-handedly handled" than earlier attempts to locate permanent atom dumps, he says.

WIPP is designed to accommodate only transuranic waste from the Defense Department. Much thought has been given to turning it into the final resting place for high-level wastes from commercial reactors, but this is not now part of its mandate.

WIPP will, however, be used to do research and experimentation with the emplacement and retrieval of vitrified high-level wastes from weapons reactors. This work is expected to supply important information for the design of the high-level facility that has existed for so long in men's dreams but has yet to find a home on Earth.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Union Sets Up Legal Fund for Occupational Health

Following the lead of civil rights and environmental groups, the AFL-CIO is setting up a legal foundation to supply expertise and coordination in occupational disease-related lawsuits.

The Occupational Health Legal Rights Foundation, to be funded with union money, has set up a small office in Washington headed by lawyer Sheldon Samuels.

The foundation intends to educate workers and exert pressure on employers to upgrade workplaces. But its primary purpose, according to a prospectus, will be to support cases where an association between toxic substances and occupational disease has only recently been suspected; cases involving known hazards where inadequate redress has been chronic; and cases where a wide-reaching legal precedent could be set. These would range from actions to change state workers' compensation laws to suits against laboratories for misrepresenting epidemiological data.

At present, workers compensation laws vary widely from state to state. Many are very old and bereft of mechanisms to make assessments, much less deliver compensation, in cases where health problems have a delayed onset, where scientific evidence is ambiguous, or where a supplier rather than an employer is at fault. The union has long been seeking to address such problems by lobbying for a national workers' compensation law.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN