

# Easing psychological distress for older rural patients

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Flinders University's Dr. Vivian Isaac (senior lecturer in rural mental health) and Ph.D. student Dennis Asante led a team that has made key observations for improving access to mental health support for older

people with other illnesses living in rural and remote Australian communities.

Their study on psychological distress and [health services](#) usage among adults aged 60 or older in rural South Australia found that a significant proportion (13%) of people who participated in the study reported moderate to high psychological distress.

Psychological distress was higher in females—but lower among those aged more than 80 years.

Through evaluating the relationship between psychological distress, multimorbidity and health services utilization, the study found that multimorbidity is highly associated with [psychological problems](#), and that this distress increases with age.

Psychological distress is associated with high health services use.

As a solution to address this problem, Dr. Isaac suggests that screening of psychological distress in [older adults](#) is required in clinical setting.

"In Australian rural environments, healthcare challenges such as poorer access to health services, inadequate healthcare professionals, particularly specialized care doctors and waiting times for clinical appointments are reported to affect the overall physical and mental well-being of rural locales," says Dr. Isaac.

"These healthcare challenges exacerbate for the rural older population who require complex health needs."

The paper, "Psychological distress, multimorbidity and health services among older adults in rural South Australia," has been published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*.

The study employed a population-based survey of almost 6,000 older South Australians in regional locations to investigate the prevalence of psychological distress in older adults (aged 60 and above) and evaluate the relationship between [psychological distress](#), multimorbidity and health service utilization in rural South Australia.

**More information:** Dennis Asante et al, Psychological distress, multimorbidity and health services among older adults in rural South Australia, *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2022.04.140](#)

Provided by Flinders University

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