

## **Abstract**

*Background:* Poor mental health is associated with considerable lost earnings in the United States, but none have studied men living below 200% of the federal poverty line. We estimated the indirect cost of reduced labor market productivity associated with poor mental health in these low-income men.

*Methods:* Low income men aged 18-64 were identified from the 2013 Medical Expenditure Panel Survey. Poor mental health was defined as Mental Health Composite Score  $\leq 45$ . Labor market outcomes were measured through number of days and hours missed work and hourly wage. Standard two-part models were used to estimate the incremental cost associated with poor mental health, adjusting for physical health and sociodemographic factors.

*Results:* Poor mental health was negatively associated with the probability of having any hours worked per week or having an hourly wage, but did not significantly impact hours worked per week and hourly wage in those who were employed. The mean incremental cost of lost productivity was 2,628 USD per person per year in men with poor mental health, and the total annual cost was estimated to 18.5 billion USD. Only 27% of low-income men with poor mental health had any contact with a mental health care provider during the year.

*Conclusions:* Poor mental health is associated with lower labor market participation and substantial impact on earnings for low income men of all race and ethnicities. Few low income men with poor mental health receive any mental health treatment, indicating a high prevalence of undiagnosed and untreated cases.