

The Kessler 10 - Information for health professionals

The Kessler 10 (K10) was developed in 1992 by Professors Kessler and Mroczek for use in the United States National Health Interview Survey as a brief measure of non-specific psychological distress in the anxiety-depression spectrum. The K10 comprises ten questions about psychological distress. It is designed to quantify the frequency and severity of anxiety- and depression-related symptoms experienced in the four weeks prior to screening [1].

The K10 is a simple measure of general distress without identifying its cause. It is a screening instrument to identify people in need of further assessment for anxiety and depression. The K10 measurement of clients' psychological distress levels can also be used as an outcome measure and assist treatment planning and monitoring.

The K10 is used in clinical settings such as Mental Health Services in New South Wales, and has also been used in research. The K10 was used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to identify psychological distress at a population level for the 1997 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, and the 2001 National Health Survey. The K10 was also used in the New South Wales Continuous Health Survey, the 2000 Health and Wellbeing Survey, the 2000 South Australian Health & Wellbeing Survey, and the annual Victorian Population Health Surveys since 2001.

Scoring the K10

Each of the 10 questions is scored 1 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*all of the time*) and scores are summed to provide a total K10 score. The lowest possible score is 10 and the highest possible score is 50. The relationship between the K10 score and psychological distress is linear. That is, lower K10 scores indicate a lower level of psychological distress while higher K10 scores indicate a higher level of psychological distress. The developers of the instrument did not recommend standardised scoring; rather they recommended that scores should be interpreted according to the population studied. Several methods of scoring the K10 have been used in Australia, with the following scoring used by the Victorian Population Health Surveys [2]:

K10 Score

10 - 15
 16 - 21
 22 - 29
 30 - 50

Level of psychological distress

Low
 Moderate level of psychological distress
 High level of psychological distress
 Very high level of psychological distress

Key to scoring the K10

	None of the time	A little of the time	Some of the time	Most of the time	All of the time
In the past four weeks, how often did you feel worn out for no real reason?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel nervous?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel hopeless?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel restless or fidgety?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel depressed?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel that everything was an effort?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?	1	2	3	4	5
In the past 4 weeks, how often did you feel worthless?	1	2	3	4	5

Distribution of scores among the general population of Victoria in 2007:

- 64% of the population scored 15 or less
- 22% of the population scored 16-21
- 8% of the population scored 22-29
- 2.4% of the population scored 30 or more

Click here for selected findings from the 2007 survey:

http://www.health.vic.gov.au/healthstatus/downloads/vic_health_survey_07_findings_part_c.pdf

References

1. Kessler, R.C., Barker, P.R., Colpe, L.J., Epstein, J.F., Gfroerer, J.C., Hiripi, E., Howes, M.J., Normand, S.-L.T., Manderscheid, R.W., Walters, E.E., and Zaslavsky, A.M., *Screening for serious mental illness in the general population*. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 2003. 60(2): p. 184-189.
2. Department of Human Services, *Victorian population health surveys*. 2001-2007, State Government of Victoria.