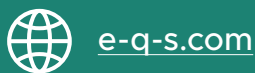


Understanding the Co-occurrence of Mental Health Conditions

With Dr Dominique Thompson

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eQuality Solutions Group (eQS) Disability Support helps remove barriers to learning in education, work and life.



What's in this guide?

- What is co-occurrence/ co-morbidity?
- Why does it matter?
- What opportunities do we have to help?
- Protective factors
- Specific conditions and co-morbidity risks
- Staying well long-term
- Resources

Why does it matter?

- Multiple studies- **>50%** of people with one MH condition have another.
- Most likely to occur between **closely related disorders** and in first 1-2years after developing a condition. Can occur up to 15 years later.
- More than one condition being present = more risk.
- This can include increased medication/ treatments, financial burden, social impact and heightened suicide risk.
- This in turn presents an **opportunity** for health and social care providers- we can look to **reduce risk** of secondary condition developing if we are aware of risk. E.g. reduce risk of substance misuse once anxiety/ depression diagnosed.

The definition of co-occurrence (comorbidity):

'The co-existence of more than one mental health condition'

Comorbidity/co-occurrence is therefore the rule, not the exception.

We should always be alert to this, and ask questions about associated conditions, mental or physical.

Cumulative heightened risk exists when more than one condition is present.

This means that:

“The simultaneous presence of two or more diseases will **worsen** the **prognosis** of all the diseases that are present, lead to an **increasing** number (and severity) of **complications** and make the **treatment** of all of them **more difficult** and, possibly, less efficacious.”



<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4054544/>

Protective factors include:

- Education to higher level
- Employment
- Physical health focus
- Health education e.g. alcohol/ drugs/ exercise/ diet
- Suicide risk prevention strategies

Conditions which frequently co-exist alongside each other:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Neurodiversity
- Tics
- Self-harm
- Substance misuse (aka 'dual diagnosis')

Key takeaway



Think to always ask 'what else is happening here?'

I.e. what conditions are co-existing together for this person?

This allows us the opportunity to offer additional support, by recognising signs and symptoms early.

Resources for student wellbeing



- NHS website/SHOUT 85258
- Apps - Student Health/ distrACT/ Self help for Anxiety Management (SAM), Eating Disorder Support
- Student Minds/ Student Space
- Charlie Waller- Supporting Student Wellbeing Videos
- Aardman Animation - 'What's Up With Everyone' campaign