Common mental disorders (CMDs) include depressive and anxiety disorders that occupy the vast majority of psychiatric morbidity in the general population. In this study, five independent cross-sectional surveys of Taiwanese respondents (≥ 18 years of age) were carried out in 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010 (N=9079 in total). Survey measures included the 12-item Chinese Health Questionnaire (CHQ), a screening questionnaire for CMDs and physical and socio-demographic risk factors for CMDs. The prevalence of probable CMDs doubled from 11.5% in 1990 to 23.8% in 2010 (time trend $p < 0.001$). This increase paralleled rises in national rates of unemployment, divorce, and suicide across the five waves. In multivariable regression model, significant risk factors of probable CMDs were being female, ≤ 6 years of education, unemployment, and being in poor physical health with limitations in daily activities. Controlling for these factors in multivariable models did not reduce the secular rise in prevalence of probable CMDs (time trend $p < 0.0001$).