

Mental health of Spanish men worsened with the crisis

A research detected a 15% increase of men with symptoms of anxiety and depression in the last Spanish National Health Survey (2012) compared with 2006

The increase is concentrated in middle-aged and lower socioeconomic status men, and is consistent with the rise in unemployment

Women with poor mental health decreased by 8 % but still are more than men

Barcelona, 2014 January 15th. - Experts and social organizations have warned of the negative effects that the economic crisis could mean for the health of the population. But it was not easy to demonstrate with data what is happening. A new comparative analysis of the last two National Health Surveys revealed a rise in mental health problems in men (from 15% in 2006 to 17% in 2012), which contrasts on the other hand with a decrease in women (25% in 2006 to 23% in 2012).

The article, published in the European Journal of Public Health, is signed by researchers from the Public Health Agency of Barcelona (ASPB) and the University of East Anglia (UK) and is part of the European research project SOPHIE (evaluation of the impact of structural policies on health inequalities, www.sophie-project.eu), coordinated by researchers at the Agency itself.

Two years ago, another study detected a worsening of mental health patients on a sample of GPs. "Now, for the first time, we have seen what was going on in the whole population," explains Xavier Bartoll, first author of the study. "In addition, we found that the changes are not homogeneous, but differed according to sex and age and socioeconomic status".

Indeed, the decline in men is not uniform, but is concentrated in people aged 35 to 54 (relative increase of 26%), with manual occupations (22%), primary or secondary education (28%), and more pronounced among immigrants (33%). The result is a significant increase in health inequalities between socio-economic levels, as highlighted in the article.

The questionnaire used in the mental health National Health Survey includes symptoms of anxiety and depression in particular. The authors emphasize that the increase in symptoms in men appears to be mainly due to the increased proportion of men in unemployment, a known risk factor for poor mental health. Another recently published study noted an increase in suicides in middle-aged men.

Conversely, the improvement in women concentrates on those that have a job. "It is possible that, despite the burden that it means, many women are experiencing greater recognition and esteem in the new role of breadwinners that they are taking in many families," said Bartoll.

Finally, he adds: "While the economy is still not recovering, long-term unemployment increases, and cutbacks on public programs of social protection occurred even after the last survey, one may not expect improvement". And wider consequences for the health of the population may start to emerge further to the miner's canary of mental health symptoms.

More information:

Xavier Bartoll, Laia Palència, Davide Malmusi, Marc Suhrcke, Carme Borrell. The evolution of mental health in Spain during the economic crisis. European Journal of Public Health, 2013 Dec 23.
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