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Background:

Information about the prevalence of current Major Depressive Episode (MDE) across European countries is essential for its monitoring and for the development of evidence-based mental health policies. The aims were to: 1) estimate the prevalence of MDE by country in Europe; and 2) assess variations in prevalence between countries.

Methods:

Data from participants of 27 countries that completed the questionnaire of the second wave of the European Health Interview Survey (EHIS-2) were analysed (n=258,888). The prevalence of MDE was quantified using the Patient Health Questionnaire-8 (PHQ-8) with a cut-off score of ≥ 10 . Prevalence and 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) were estimated for each country. Variation in prevalence (country vs the rest) was evaluated using bivariable and multivariable negative binomial regression models considering the specific country as the main explanatory variable. From these models, crude Prevalence Ratios (PR) and adjusted Prevalence Ratios (aPR) were obtained.

Results:

The overall prevalence of current MDE in Europe was 6.38% (6.24%-6.52%). The country with the lowest prevalence was the Czech Republic (2.58%, 2.14%-3.02%) and the country with highest prevalence Iceland (10.33%, 9.33%-11.32%). In all the countries (except for Finland and Croatia) prevalence was higher in women than in men. The countries with the highest aPR were Germany (aPR: 1.80, 95% CI: 1.71-1.89) and Luxembourg (aPR: 1.50, 95% CI: 1.35-1.66), while Slovakia (aPR: 0.28, 95% CI: 0.24-0.33) and the Czech Republic (aPR: 0.32, 95% CI: 0.27-0.38) exhibited the lowest aPR.

Conclusions:

Considerable variability in the prevalence of MDE by country in Europe was observed without a clear pattern. These results serve as baseline for monitoring the prevalence of MDE at a European level and suggest a need for developing preventive strategies against depression, particularly in those countries identified with the highest prevalence.

Key messages:

- The results of this study show that the overall prevalence of MDE is high (6.38%), with important variation across countries (ranging from 2.58% in the Czech Republic to 10.33% in Iceland).
- The results found could serve as a reference for the monitoring of MDE in Europe and for the development of screening and preventive strategies both at European level as well as at a country level.

Prevalence of Major Depressive Episode in 27 European Countries

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