

MENTAL HEALTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN PORTUGAL



Oswaldo Santos^{1,2,3}, Ana Virgolino^{1,2}, Maria João Heitor^{1,4,5}, Mónica Fialho¹, Alexandra Costa⁶, Célia Rasga⁶, Hugo Martiniano⁶, Joana Costa^{1,2}, Astrid Vicente⁶, Teresa Caldas de Almeida⁶

¹ Environmental Health Behaviour Lab, Instituto de Saúde Ambiental, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal, ² Laboratório Associado TERRA, Faculdade de Medicina, Universidade de Lisboa, Lisboa, Portugal, ³ Unbreakable Idea Research, Cadaval, Portugal, ⁴ Departamento de Psiquiatria e Saúde Mental, Hospital Beatriz Ângelo, Loures, Portugal, ⁵ Sociedade Portuguesa de Psiquiatria e Saúde Mental, Lisboa, Portugal, ⁶ Instituto Nacional de Saúde Doutor Ricardo Jorge, Lisboa, Portugal

* Corresponding author: osantos@medicina.ulisboa.pt

Background

COVID-19 is, inevitably, associated with changes in public mental health. This may be a result of both the globalized perception of serious health risk and the massive social and economic measures required to control the pandemic [1-6].

Aims

A main goal of the SM-COVID19 study was to characterize the mental health of the general population and to identify vulnerable groups, during the first lockdown in Portugal.

Methods

Study design: Cross-sectional study

Sample: Non-probabilistic sample of adults (≥ 18 years) residing in Portugal (mainland and autonomous regions)

Data collection: Online survey (May 22 to July 20, 2020); data collected with sound psychometric scales for symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), work-life balance, resilience, work-related variables, and sociodemographic indicators

Data analysis: Data cleaning and weighting (by sex, age group, NUTS II and educational level). Logistic regression models used to assess risk and protective factors for mental health suffering.

Results

- 3982 participants (female, 79.1%; mean age, 45.15 \pm 12.31 years; 71.0% highly educated)
- Prevalence of symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety: 26.5% (95% CI, 24.0-29.1); prevalence of depression symptoms: 26.0% (95% CI, 23.6-28.7); prevalence of PTSD symptoms 26.5% (95%CI, 24.0-29.2)
- Four out of ten participants (41.2%; 95%CI: 38.3-44.1) reported symptomatology for at least one of the 3 domains of psychological suffering: depression, anxiety or PTSD)
- Women, individuals who suspended their professional activity (or in layoff or unemployed) during the lockdown, and those with difficulties in managing work and family demands had higher odds for psychological suffering

Conclusion

Mental health and wellbeing are being severely affected due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Mental health protection measures need to be defined and implemented, and these should target the most vulnerable groups.

