

**Do elderly people feel sad and depressed? Mental health of ageing people.
A cross-country comparison based on SHARE.**

**Isabella Buber-Ennser
Vienna Institute of Demography
Austrian Academy of Sciences
Prinz Eugen Strasse 8
1040 Vienna
Isabella.buber@oeaw.ac.at**

A person's mental health is an important aspect of every day's living and well-being and the prevalence of psychiatric disorders is greater than previously thought to be the case (Bowers et al. 1990, Kessler et al. 1994, Drake et al. 2001). Especially among older people the number of those with psychiatric disorders is expected to increase within the next decades (Jeste et al. 1999). The paper focuses on the mental health of elderly people in Europe using a comparative approach to reveal age-, gender- and country-specific differences.

The paper is based on the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), a multidisciplinary and cross-national data base, including eleven European countries, carried out for the first time in 2004 as the baseline for a panel study (Börsch-Supan et al. 2005). The data include accurate information on health, retirement and socio-economic situation of 22.777 persons.

We concentrate on the question whether elderly people feel sad or depressed, whether they feel guilty, have troubles in sleeping and keep up with interests. Moreover, we have information on irritability, appetite, fatigue, tearfulness and depressions. By controlling for several socio-economic (e.g. income sources, housing conditions, etc.) and socio-demographic (e.g. family status, children, etc.) factors we aim to gain more insight in the situation of the mental health of people aged 50 years and more.

First analyses reveal that more than one third of elderly people feel sad or depressed (Table 1b) with age-, gender- and country-specific differences (See Table 2a – Table 3b): Especially very old people, i.e. those aged 80 years and older, more likely feel sad or depressed. Consistent with previous risk factor research (Kessler et al. 1994) we find elevated rates of affective disorders among women with 26% among men and 44% among women feeling depressed. Country-specific differences point out that we might get interesting new insights in mental health of elderly persons in Europe.

Tables

All tables refer to the question: “In the last month, have you been sad or depressed?”

Table 1a: Mental health by age-group, absolute numbers

Age	Yes	No	Refusal	Don't know	Total
Under 50	338	548	1	14	901
50-60	2799	5019	3	52	7873
60-70	2418	4608	4	31	7061
70-80	1754	2828	5	56	4643
80 and more	814	1077	5	70	1966
Total	8123	14080	18	223	22444

Source: SHARE release 0

Table 1b: Mental health by age-group, percentages

Age	Yes	No	Refusal	Don't know	Total
Under 50	37,5	60,8	0,1	1,6	100
50-60	35,6	63,7	0,0	0,7	100
60-70	34,2	65,3	0,1	0,4	100
70-80	37,8	60,9	0,1	1,2	100
80 and more	41,4	54,8	0,3	3,6	100
Total	36,2	62,7	0,1	1,0	100

Source: SHARE release 0

Table 2a: Mental health by gender, absolute numbers

Gender	Yes	No	Refusal	Don't know	Total
Male	2598,0	7243,0	11,0	94,0	9946
Female	5533,0	6851,0	12,0	130,0	12526
Total	8131,0	14094,0	23,0	224,0	22472,0

Source: SHARE release 0

Table 2b: Mental health by gender, percentages

Gender	Yes	No	Refusal	Don't know	Total
Male	26,1	72,8	0,1	0,9	100
Female	44,2	54,7	0,1	1,0	100
Total	36,2	62,7	0,1	1,0	200,0

Source: SHARE release 0

Table 3a: Mental health by countries, absolute numbers

Country	Yes	No	Refusal	Don't know	Total
Austria	596	1356		7	1959
Germany	1120	1853	12	26	3011
Sweden	997	2019	1	23	3040
The Netherlands	919	1998	1	43	2961
Spain	997	1355	1	27	2380
Italy	1071	1470	4	1	2546
France	817	896	1	37	1751
Denmark	549	1144	1	7	1701
Greece	669	1409		52	2130
Switzerland	396	604		1	1001
Total	8131	14104	21	224	22480

Source: SHARE release 0

Table 3b: Mental health by countries, percentages

Country	Yes	No	Refusal	Don't know	Total
Austria	30,4	69,2	0,0	0,4	100
Germany	37,2	61,5	0,4	0,9	100
Sweden	32,8	66,4	0,0	0,8	100
The Netherlands	31,0	67,5	0,0	1,5	100
Spain	41,9	56,9	0,0	1,1	100
Italy	42,1	57,7	0,2	0,0	100
France	46,7	51,2	0,1	2,1	100
Denmark	32,3	67,3	0,1	0,4	100
Greece	31,4	66,2	0,0	2,4	100
Switzerland	39,6	60,3	0,0	0,1	100
Total	36,2	62,7	0,1	1,0	100

Source: SHARE release 0

Literature

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