

DEPRESSION AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS: AN 8-YEAR LONGITUDINAL POPULATION-BASED STUDY

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Background

Low socio-economic status, particularly when assessed by indices of material standard of living, is consistently associated with a higher prevalence of depression (Lorant et al., 2003). However, since all available studies used cross-over designs, it is not possible to determine to what extent a change in socio-economic status could influence the risk for depression.

Methods

The study used the Belgian households panel survey, based on annual (1992–1999) face-to-face interviews of a representative sample of the Belgian population of 11,909 persons. The severity of the depressive symptomatology was assessed by a 15-item self-rating scale: the Health and Daily Living Form (HDL) from Moos which in addition indicates the presence of a diagnosis of major depression. The assessment of socio-economic status included subjective financial strain, poverty, deprivation, income, educational status, unemployment, social capital, and living with a partner. Statistical analysis used a longitudinal variance ratio coupled with a standard fixed-effect panel-data model and a conditional logistic regression.

Results

The level of depression was increased when the persons became poor ($b = 0.42$) or confronted to subjective financial strain ($b = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$). An improvement in social capital ($b = -0.22$, $p < 0.01$) and particularly moving to live with a partner of spouse ($b = -1.19$, $p < 0.001$) decreased the level of depression. Confirming these results, the appearance of a diagnosis of major depression was favored by an increase in subjective financial strain ($OR = 1.20$, $p < 0.001$) whereas getting a partner exhibited a protective effect ($OR = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$). The effects were different according to gender. The changes in subjective financial strain influenced depression more significantly among women ($b = 0.58$ vs 0.25 , $p < 0.001$). Similarly, modifications in poverty modified depression only among women ($b = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, changes in partnership influenced depression much more notably among women as compared to men ($b = -1.87$ vs -0.63 , $p < 0.001$). A stratification according to the mean income during the 8-year period did not reveal differences in the influence of socio-economic status. Taking into account the direction of the changes, we found that a decrease in subjective financial strain was associated with more symptoms of depression ($b = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$) whereas the opposite was true for a decrease in objective financial strain ($b = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Regarding the presence of a partner, only the loss played a significant role in increasing depression ($b = 1.64$, $p < 0.001$) and leading to a diagnosis of major depression ($OR = 2.41$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion

Changes in individual social and economic status exhibit a significant effect of the risk of depression. Two factors play a major role : the loss of a partner, particularly in women, and changes in subjective financial strain, again more significantly in women. Two factors play a minor role : decrease in poverty, only among women, and change in social capital.

References

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