

THE MENTAL CONDITION OF THE INHABITANTS OF POLAND

“A comprehensive study of the mental health of society and its determinants – EZOP II” Project’s report”. Jacek Moskalewicz & Jacek Wciórka (eds), IPiN, Warszawa 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report highlights the results of a comprehensive, national survey conducted on a general population random sample of 15,000 inhabitants of Poland. The prevalence of mental disorders and their determinants are presented for children up to 6 years of age, for children and youth between 7 and 17 years and for adults.

The most up-to-date research instruments were adopted and applied, including ASQ for the youngest age group, MINI Kid for the children and teenagers and WHO-CIDI for the adult population. The study was conducted by over two hundred interviewers trained in small groups in five-day training sessions. The quality of the field work was constantly monitored using advanced tools measuring the time to complete each question and individual sections.

Developmental disorders affect over 400 thousand of the youngest group (aged 0-6 years). The percentage of children with these disorders in the countryside surpasses 20% so there is an urgent need for support to raise parental skills as well as institutional support, including access to kindergartens and pre-school facilities in particular in rural areas.

Every eighth child aged 7-17 years experienced mental disorders, which could be extrapolated to over half a million of children of that age. Anxiety disorders dominated followed by disorders associated with substance use. Children from families receiving social welfare support are particularly at risk as 20% suffer from mental disorders. Accumulation of negative factors including poor material conditions and health represents a burning challenge which should be faced by close cooperation between social welfare, psychological and medical care services.

More than a quarter of adults experienced mental disorders in their lifetime, which is over 8 million persons. This percentage is higher among people with less education, those who are solitary (divorced or widowed) as well as persons who have prematurely left the labour market due to unemployment, disability or other causes. As among school children, anxiety disorders prevail followed by disorders due to alcohol use.

Only about a dozen percent of those who suffer from mental disorders received specialised psychiatric or psychological care. This treatment gap is not only a result of poor access but also it is due to the stigmatisation of those with mental disorders as well as mental health services. Over half would not accept the presence of people with mental disorders in their immediate environment or the presence of psychiatric services near their place of residence.

Without a fundamental change in the system of psychiatric care, we will not be able to tackle this situation. Addressing the sources of the poor mental condition of Poland's citizens requires evidence-based intervention that includes promotion of mental health and the prevention and treatment of disorders.