

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM A CROSS-COUNTRY SURVEY

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Introduction

There is an increased risk of mental illness during early adulthood, and many psychiatric conditions have an onset at 17–24 years of age. Hence, the mental health of university students is a public health concern, as it can be negatively influenced by the numerous stressors encountered during the college years and increase the risk of multiple physical and psychiatric illnesses. Academic stress is an important variable that has received researchers' attention in the last 20 years and many studies showed how the incidence of mental health problems among university students is directly associated with increased academic stress [1,2].

Aim

To study interactive relations among traits and predictors of psychological well-being in university students and to assess differences among Italy, Spain and Portugal.

Methods

The data are collected anonymously through an online survey during the academic year 2022/2023. The survey was implemented using electronic CRF on the REDCap application of the University of Turin. Validated psychometric measures were adopted to explore psychological well-being (through the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form), anxiety-depression (through the Patient Health Questionnaire-4) and suicidal behaviors (through Suicide Behaviours Questionnaire).

Multiple linear regressions will be performed to investigate the associations between sociodemographic characteristics and students' psychological well-being. Furthermore, the network analysis models will be used to assess interactions between different predictors and psychological well-being traits [3]. This statistical framework has been used increasingly to explore the relations between a wide variety of disorders and symptoms in psychiatry [4].

Data collection is still ongoing at the time of abstract submission.

Results

Preliminary results were performed on a sub-sample of 683 students, 313 from Italy (randomly selected among 5500 respondents) and 370 from Spain. Most students are women (75%) and the overall mean age is 22 years (IQR 20-24), although Spanish students are younger than Italian ones (21 years (IQR 20-23) vs 23 years (IQR 21-25), $p < 0.001$). Italian students are evenly distributed between those who are studying in their home town, those who are commuting and those who have moved (around 30-35% in each category), whereas in Spain only 8% of students commutes for studying. In Italy, 27% of students work in addition to studying compared to 14% in Spain ($p < 0.001$), whereas in Spain about 30% of students has a scholarship (compared to 11% in Italy, $p < 0.001$). Results from MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status indicate that in Italy the students feel they belong to a higher social status than their Spanish peers (median score 7 (IQR 5-7) vs 6 (IQR 5-7), $p = 0.019$). No differences between the two countries related to anxiety-depression symptoms and suicidal behaviours have been observed. However, the score of the psychological well-being

scale seems to be higher among Spanish students than among Italian ones (33 (IRQ 24-40) vs 42 (IQR 30-52), $p < 0.001$).

Conclusions

These preliminary results show a difference in psychological well-being and in different features of student life between Spain and Italy. Several factors still need to be analysed in detail and the comparison with the Portuguese sample may show further differences.

By putting all these factors into a network, the models can estimate which factor could be most “central” or “bridged”. Furthermore, the next application of network analytic techniques could allow us to better understand the interactive relations among traits and predictors of psychological well-being in university students, as well as to identify the central and bridged predictors, and to assess differences between countries more comprehensively.

Bibliografy

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