



*This study has been published on-line in the journal **Molecular Psychiatry**, one of most important journals in the field of Psychiatry.*

Diseases considered as mild most affect a country's productivity

According to the results of the World Mental Health Survey carried out by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which has assessed 19 common disabling diseases

Barcelona, 19th October 2010.- Days of absence due to illness are the main source of lost human capital for a country's economy. A paper led by researchers from the **IMIM Health Services Research Group (Hospital del Mar Research Institute)**, has studied what mental and physical disorders occur most commonly and account for days of absence from the usual daily activity. The study was carried out in 24 countries, including Spain, as part of the *WHO World Mental Health Survey*, the largest international research initiative for a comprehensive assessment of the epidemiology of mental disorders worldwide.

While not finding significant differences between the countries assessed, the study found that the health problems most affecting a country's productivity are those which we sometimes consider as being less serious, such as those associated with pain: **arthritis, chronic neck and back pain**. These illnesses are, by far, the most disabling as they account for 21.5% of all full days of absence, followed by **migraines / severe headache, cardiovascular diseases and depression**.

Through personal interviews with **62,971 adults**, researchers assessed the number of days, in the past month, that the participants were completely unable to work or perform their normal daily activities due to problems related to mental or physical health. One in every seven respondents (12.8%) reported that they had had at least one full day of disability in the past month. Disability length was also studied and, among the diseases studied (10 physical and 9 mental), those which led to the largest number of days lost were **neurological disorders** (including stroke, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's disease; 17.4 additional days lost each year for those who have this disorder), **bipolar disorder** (17.3 additional days lost) and **post-traumatic stress disorder** (15.2 additional days lost).

With regard to **mental disorders**, it should be noted that these are the most disabling for the people suffering from them, yet as they are not as common, these disorders do not cause the largest amount of lost productivity. For instance, while bipolar disorder is one of the mental disorders which cause the greatest disability, it is very uncommon. In contrast to this, major depression is both disabling and common, and therefore, is a major cause of lost social productivity.

The study also found that chronic disorders tend to co-exist in an individual patient at the same time. A possible result of the survey's data is the importance of all of the disorders as a whole, given that treating or eliminating one of the disorders will not optimally improve the disability. Some disorders, which are not by themselves the most disabling, are currently assessed as such because of the way they are associated with other disorders.

According to **Dr. Jordi Alonso**, coordinator of the IMIM Health Services Research Group and lead author of the paper, this work "*is important because we took into account the trend of suffering from more than*



one disorder and estimated what part of the disability is attributable to which disorder, as well as the existing need to treat all disorders in order to regain productivity. This should have implications for designing intervention strategies to diminish population level disability.”

In conclusion, a large part of a country’s lost productivity is explained by a short list of physical and mental disorders. Therefore, it is important, from the point of view of both individual health and social productivity, to try to limit their impact.

Reference Article:

Alonso J, Petukhova M, Vilagut G, Chatterji S, Heeringa S, Üsün TB, et al. Days out of role due to common physical and mental conditions: results from the WHO World Mental Health surveys. *Mol Psychiatry* 2010 advance online publication 12 October 2010; doi: 10.1038/mp.2010.101

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