

## **Mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in Portugal**

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### **Background:**

Mental health is being impacted by COVID-19, as a result of both the globalized perception of health risk and the massive social and economic measures, required to control the pandemic. A main goal of this study, the SM-COVID19, was to characterize the mental health of the general population and to identify vulnerable groups, during the first lockdown in Portugal.

### **Methods:**

Cross-sectional online survey, conducted between May 22 and July 20, 2020, with a nationwide non-probabilistic sample of adults residing in Portugal ( $\geq 18$  years old). Data were collected with sound psychometric scales for symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), work-life balance, resilience, work-related variables, and sociodemographics. Logistic regression models were used to assess risk and protective factors for mental health suffering.

### **Results:**

Overall, 3982 individuals participated in the study (female, 79.1%; mean age,  $45.15 \pm 12.31$  years; 71.0% completed higher education studies). The prevalence of symptoms of moderate to severe anxiety was 26.5% (95% Confidence Interval (CI): 24.0-29.1), of depression symptoms was 26.0% (95%CI, 23.6-28.7), and of PTSD symptoms was 26.5% (95%CI, 24.0-29.2). Moreover, more than one third of the respondents (41.2%; 95%CI: 38.3-44.1) reported symptomatology for at least one of these three psychiatric disorders. Women, individuals who suspended their professional activity (or in layoff or unemployed) during the lockdown, and those with difficulties in managing work and family demands had higher odds for psychological suffering.

### **Conclusions:**

The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health crisis with major interpersonal, social and economic impacts at the individual level. Mental health and wellbeing are being severely affected, as confirmed by the high prevalence of symptoms of psychological suffering herein. Mental health protection measures need to be defined and implemented, mainly targeting the most vulnerable groups.

### **Key messages:**

- COVID-19 pandemic is associated with high prevalence of anxiety, depression and PTSD.
- Observed mental health inequities imply effective vulnerable-groups-focused mental health promotion programs.