



The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health and Socio-Economic Conditions of the Portuguese People

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Short Letter

Recently, several studies have been published on the impact of confinement (due to the Covid-19 pandemic) on the mental health of the Portuguese people [1]. For example, the Instituto de Psicologia Clínica e Forense (Institute of Forensic Psychology) carried out a study with 10,500 participants from the general Portuguese population, and found that 49.2% of them showed “moderate or severe” psychological impacts. Many of these people reported no mental disorders prior to the pandemic. Women were the group most susceptible to presenting some of the psychological symptoms mentioned above [2]. These investigations support others works on the impact of socioeconomic crises on the mental health of Portuguese people, which have shown that there is a relationship between the increase in symptoms of anxiety and depression and a decrease in well-being due to job insecurity, loss of income, unemployment and social isolation [3]. We should also note the effects of the pandemic (e.g., high mortality, decreased sleep hours, rationing of equipment for personal protection, etc.) on health professionals (doctors, nurses, diagnostic technicians), during the fight against Covid-19 in Portugal, where it has been shown that 72% of these professionals have medium or high levels of physical and/or psychological exhaustion, identical to “burnout”. During non-pandemic times, this value is between 21% and 47% [4]. Furthermore, due to the pandemic, Portugal experienced an increase in mortality. The age group most affected was those 65 years or older [5].

Related to the above, for reasons of public health due to the pandemic, some sectors of activity in Portugal suffered an abrupt drop in their income (with values varying according to the sector). Catering and tourism, the clothing industry and transport services (aviation), among others, were placed in a fragile situation. This affected about 30% of the total active labor force in Portugal. The affected companies sought to minimize the situation through simplified lay-offs and the temporary suspension of employment

contracts. Thus, at the end of April 2020, absolute unemployment in Portugal increased by 22% compared to the same time one year previously. The most-affected age group was that of young people (especially among those with a low level of education), who had great difficulty in finding their first employment contract or who saw their precarious contract not renewed [6]. The generalization of teleworking has been an alternative form of work adopted by many companies during the confinement as a means of combatting unemployment. Thus, while in 2019 only 6.5% of workers in Portugal were in a teleworking situation, since the beginning of the pandemic, the number has grown from 17% (in the case of micro companies) to 74% (in the case of large companies) [7]. It should be also noted that families with school-age children began to use internet and television broadcasts as ways to attend classes at a distance.

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