



World Health Day 2017 – Depression: Let’s Talk

Depression can be treated. If you think you have depression talk to someone you trust (World Health Organisation).

Overview

The World Health day is celebrated on the 7th April 2017. This year, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has chosen the theme ‘Depression: Let’s talk’¹ with the aim of raising awareness on depression and the importance of seeking help early and subsequent early intervention. It is believed that stigma and lack of support for persons with mental disorders may prevent many from accessing the treatment they need to live healthy, productive lives.

Prevalence of depression

According to the WHO depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide and more than 300 million people are living with depression¹. The European Health Interview Survey² (EHIS 2014/2015) showed that the percentage of persons diagnosed with chronic depression in the EU varies substantially with Ireland reporting the highest percentage at 12.1% and Romania the lowest at 1.5%. In Malta, **5.4%** of individuals aged 15 years and over reported having experienced depression in the preceding 12 months of the survey³. This figure increases to **6.7%** if one includes persons reporting having had depression some time in their life. These figures might be an underestimate since these were self-reported rates and persons with a mental health condition may not wish to participate in the survey or to answer questions on mental health. The percentage of persons reporting chronic depression in Malta has remained stable over the past 12 years (2002-2014) although depression appears to be increasing in the elderly³.

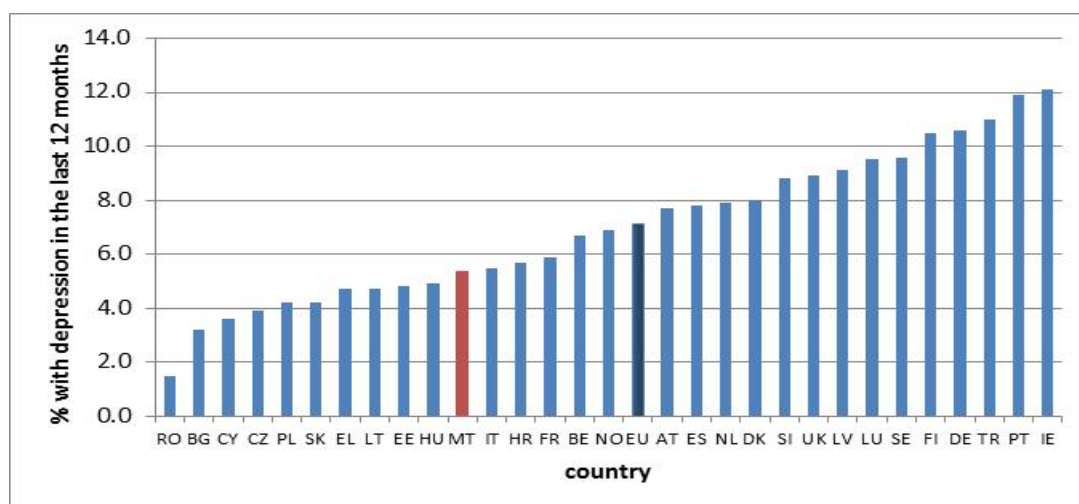


Figure 1: % of persons with depression in the past 12 months in the EU²

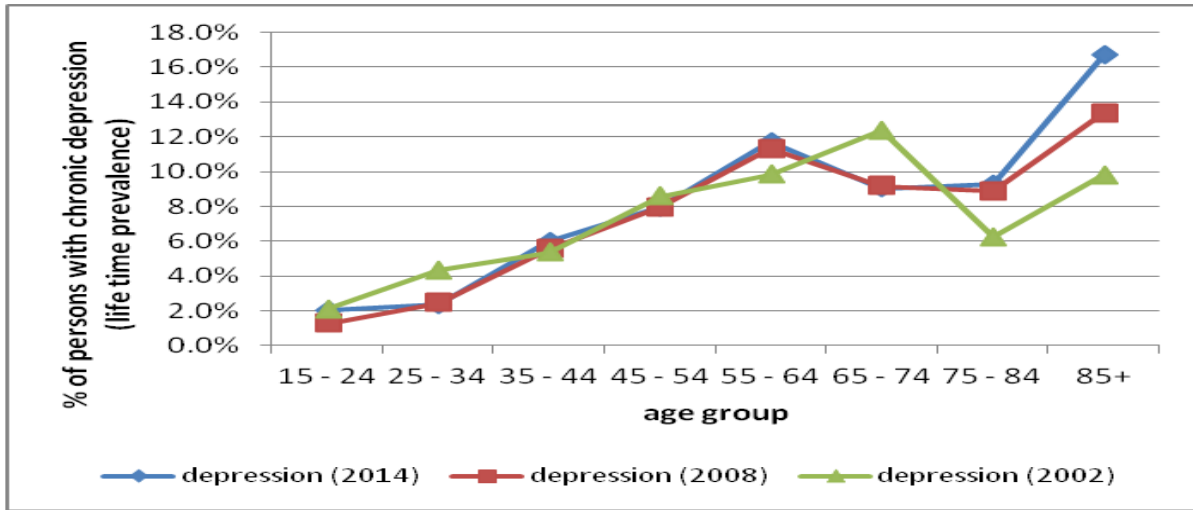


Figure 2: % of persons with chronic depression (life time prevalence)³

Depression also affects children. A study conducted locally in 2007 showed that 21.3% of form 3 students were at risk of developing depression.⁴ A subsequent study done in 2015, found this to be 27.3% among form 4 students.⁵ Thus, early detection and intervention are paramount to improve health outcomes.

Risk factors associated with depression

Depression is a condition which often results from complex interplay of biological, social and psychological factors.¹ Depression varies in severity and its impact on daily life. According to the Health Interview Survey carried out in Malta in 2014-2015³, depression was found to be more common in females with 6.5% of females compared to 4.2% of males reporting depression over the previous 12 months. Higher percentages of depression were reported by persons of lower educational level, and in widowed or divorced persons (figure 3,4)³.

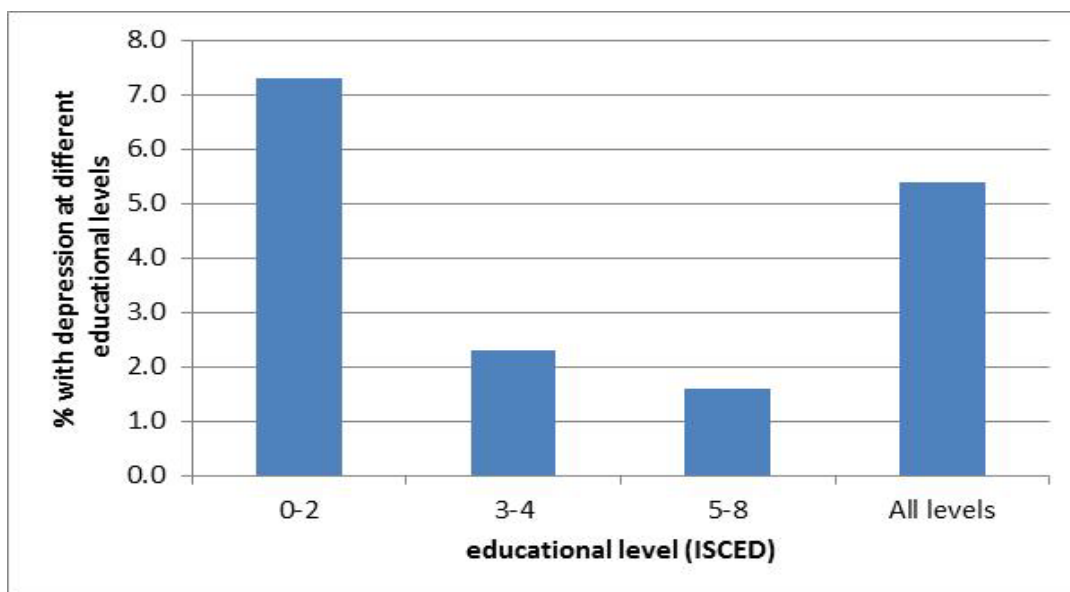


Figure 3: % of persons with depression by educational level

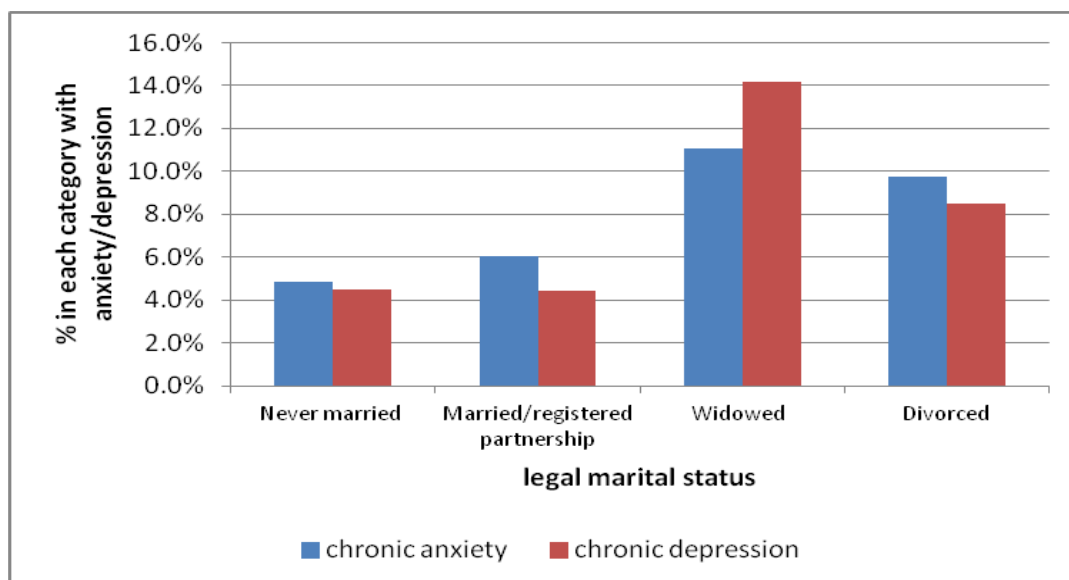


Figure 4: % of persons with anxiety and depression by marital status

There are effective treatments for moderate and severe depression. Thus, raising awareness on depression helps fight the associated stigma and increases the likelihood that persons seek help. “For someone living with depression, talking to a person they trust is often the first step towards treatment and recovery” (Dr Shekhar Saxena Director of the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse at WHO).¹

This fact sheet has been compiled by the Directorate for Health Information and Research in collaboration with the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate.

References

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5. Buttigieg A. (2015). Factors influencing help-seeking for mental health problems in adolescents. (Master’s thesis), University of Malta, Msida, Malta (unpublished).