

Title: Cross-national epidemiology of DSM-IV major depressive episode

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A large study from the World Health Organization determined that people from affluent countries tend to have higher rates of depression.

Over 90,000 people from 18 countries on 5 continents were interviewed and assessed regarding their history of depression using a standardized list of nine criteria. The researchers divided the countries into high- and middle-to-low income groups according to average household earnings.

Although nearly 121 million worldwide suffer from depression, this study found that the highest rates of depression were in France, with 21% suffering, and 19.2% in US reporting an extended period of depression at some point in their life. Lower-income countries such as China (6.5 percent) and Mexico (8 percent) had the lowest incidences of depression.

It was indicated that women are twice as likely to experience depression and that separation or divorce can often be a likely cause for the condition.

Depression is a contributor to shorter life span, poor health and decreased productivity, according to Ronald Kessler of Harvard Medical School. "The higher rates of depression in affluent countries may be due to differences in societal expectations for a good life."

Two forms of depression were looked at: clinical depression, which is a biological condition, with symptoms being low self esteem and loss of interest in normally enjoyable activities, and various types of mild depression caused by environmental influences or specific situations.

Lead researcher Evelyn Bromet, a professor and epidemiologist at Stony Brook University Medical Center in Stony Brook, New York stated, "We have shown that depression is a significant public-health concern across all regions of the world and is strongly linked to social conditions. Understanding the patterns and causes of depression can help global initiatives in reducing the impact of depression on individual lives and in reducing the burden to society."