The ADEPD Study

The Assessment of the Determinants and Epidemiology of Psychological Distress (ADEPD) Study was established to provide information about the relationship between psychological distress and a range of demographic, social, economic, and health-related characteristics in the South Australian population.

This report describes how being unemployed or unable to work is related to psychological distress and outlines factors associated with psychological distress among these groups. The report highlights these relationships in order to determine variables that could allow a reduction in the level of psychological distress in South Australia.
The South Australian Monitoring and Surveillance System (SAMSS) is a continuous telephone data collection system that interviews a representative sample of South Australians of all ages each month. SAMSS monitors the prevalence of employment categories, risk factors and related determinants in the South Australian population.

Psychological distress was measured for respondents aged 16 years and over using the Kessler 10 scale. The survey included these ten questions relating to psychological distress over the four weeks prior to the interview. SAMSS also includes questions about respondents’ health as well as many socioeconomic and demographic factors. Univariate and multivariate logistic regression models were produced to determine if employment status was associated with psychological distress.

Participants were asked which category best describes their current employment status: employed (self employed, employed for wages, salary or payment in kind), unemployed, unable to work and other (engaged in home duties, student, retired, other).

Among respondents aged 16 years and over interviewed between July 2003 and June 2007 (n = 22,582), 2.3% were unemployed, 3.2% were unable to work, 59.6% were employed and 34.9% were engaged in home duties (8.0%), student (6.9%), retired (19.9%) and other (0.1%).

The prevalence of those being unemployed and unable to work did not significantly change over the 2003-04 to 2006-07 period.

The overall prevalence of psychological distress among respondents between July 2003 and June 2007 was 9.8%.

Respondents who were unemployed or unable to work were significantly more likely to report higher levels of psychological distress than respondents who were employed (Figure 1).

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![Figure 1: Prevalence of psychological distress by employment status](image-url)

Employment status, age and psychological distress

Table 1: Prevalence of employment status by age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Unable to work</th>
<th>Other*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 to 34 years</td>
<td>66.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 49 years</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 64 years</td>
<td>65.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years plus</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australian Monitoring and Surveillance System, July 2003 to June 2007, ages 16+
* The category 'Other' includes those engaged in home duties, students, retired and other.

Employment status by age group is shown in Table 1. The prevalence of being unemployed decreased with age, while the prevalence of being unable to work increased up to the age of 64 (Table 1). Analysis by age shows that those unemployed or unable to work had significantly higher levels of psychological distress than those employed in all age groups, not considering the 65 years and older age group. The highest prevalence of psychological distress for these two employment categories was in the 35 to 49 years age group (Table 2).

Table 2: Prevalence of psychological distress by employment status and age group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Employed</th>
<th>Unemployed</th>
<th>Unable to work</th>
<th>Other*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 to 34 years</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 49 years</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 64 years</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years plus</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: South Australian Monitoring and Surveillance System, July 2003 to June 2007, ages 16+
* The category 'Other' includes those engaged in home duties, students, retired and other.

Factors associated with psychological distress among those unemployed or unable to work

Statistical models were then produced to determine variables associated with psychological distress specifically among those unemployed and those unable to work.

This modelling allowed a range of factors to be tested, including demographic factors such as age, sex, marital status, country of birth; socioeconomic factors including employment status, level of education and income; as well as health factors such as blood pressure, smoking status, risk of harm from alcohol and physical activity.

Demographic factors

For those unemployed or unable to work, females were significantly more likely to report psychological distress compared to males (Table 3).
Conclusions

Those who were unemployed or unable to work were significantly more likely to report high levels of psychological distress than those employed, particularly among those under 50 years of age.

Amongst those unemployed or unable to work, females were significantly more likely to report higher levels of psychological distress, while respondents aged 50 or above, those living in a country area of South Australia and those having a household income between $20,001 and $60,000 were significantly less likely to report psychological distress.

Overall being unemployed or unable to work may be considered to increase the likelihood of reporting psychological distress.

For further information visit:

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