

PARCHEMINS STUDY

Mental health of undocumented and regularized migrants in Geneva

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What is already known on this topic

The mental health of migrants without a valid residence permit (undocumented), although numerous in Europe, remains poorly known given the difficulty of conducting quality surveys among this population. Previous studies have shown that they often face difficulties in accessing health care and are exposed to precarious living and working conditions that can have negative consequences on their health.

What this study adds

Our study seeks to describe the mental health of this population in Geneva, including the factors that promote better health. We interviewed the participants of the Parchemins study divided into two groups, undocumented migrants and those in the process of regularisation through the Papyrus programme. Using questionnaires, we determined the frequency of several common mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and sleep disorders.

The results show that these problems are common in both groups, especially among undocumented migrants. Overall, about one in two people show signs of depression, one in three shows signs of anxiety and one in four shows signs of sleep disorders. Few participants have received medical diagnosis and treatment for these problems. In comparison, the population of Geneva also frequently suffers from mental health problems, but less frequently.

The following factors are associated with better mental health regardless of legal status: older age, not having been exposed to discrimination and abuse, not suffering from social isolation, having more financial resources and not suffering several long-term illnesses.

Conclusions and recommendations

Our study shows that mental health problems are frequent and under-diagnosed. This demonstrates the importance of facilitating access to medical care, including mental health care. Furthermore, prevention should be strengthened by facilitating participation in social life in order to tackle feelings of isolation, by reducing economic insecurity and by ensuring protection against various forms of discrimination and abuse.

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