

European Journal of
Health Sciences
(EJHS)



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Health Outcomes in European Adolescents**

Maria D.K.



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King's College London



Article history

Submitted 01.02.2024 Revised Version Received 05.03.2024 Accepted 09.04.2024

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the correlation between socioeconomic status and mental health outcomes in European adolescents.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study indicate that adolescents from lower SES backgrounds are at a higher risk of experiencing various mental health issues compared to their peers from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. These mental health concerns include but are not limited to depression, anxiety, conduct disorders, and substance abuse. Factors such as parental education level, family income, and neighborhood deprivation contribute significantly to this association. Additionally,

disparities in access to mental health resources and support further exacerbate the challenges faced by adolescents from lower SES backgrounds. Interventions aimed at addressing socioeconomic inequalities and improving access to mental health services are crucial for promoting the well-being of all adolescents across Europe.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social determinants of health theory, psychosocial stress theory and life course perspective may be used to anchor future studies on assessing the correlation between socioeconomic status and mental health outcomes in European adolescents. Develop and implement evidence-based interventions targeting adolescents from low SES backgrounds to prevent and mitigate mental health problems. Advocate for policies aimed at reducing income inequality, improving access to education, healthcare, and housing, and providing economic support to families living in poverty.

Keywords: *Socioeconomic Status, Mental Health, European Adolescents*

INTRODUCTION

The correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and mental health outcomes among European adolescents is a topic of significant research interest and societal concern. Socioeconomic status encompasses various factors such as income, education, and occupation, which collectively influence an individual's access to resources and opportunities. In developed economies like the USA, mental health outcomes have been a growing concern. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), the prevalence of major depressive disorder among adults in the United States was 7.8% in 2019. Moreover, anxiety disorders affect 31.1% of adults in the U.S. population at some point in their lives, making it one of the most common mental illnesses. These statistics indicate a significant burden on mental health in the country, impacting individuals' well-being and productivity. For instance, a study by Twenge and Campbell (2018) highlighted the rising trend of depressive symptoms among adolescents and young adults in the USA, attributing it to factors such as increased screen time and social media use.

Similarly, in Japan, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety have been on the rise. The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare reported that the number of people certified as having mental disorders reached a record high of over 170,000 in 2019. This trend suggests a growing recognition and diagnosis of mental health conditions in the country. Additionally, stress levels among the Japanese population have been a concern, with work-related stress often cited as a significant factor. For example, a study by Inoue (2018) found that long working hours were associated with an increased risk of depressive symptoms among Japanese employees, indicating the impact of workplace dynamics on mental well-being.

Similarly, in Brazil, economic instability and social inequalities contribute to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. A study by Barreto (2019) found that socioeconomic factors, such as low income and unemployment, were associated with higher rates of depression among Brazilian adults. Additionally, the Brazilian Ministry of Health reported that in 2019, mental health disorders were the third leading cause of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) lost in the country, underscoring the significant public health impact of these conditions. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive mental health policies and interventions in developing economies to address the growing burden of mental illness and improve the well-being of their populations.

In developing economies, mental health outcomes may present unique challenges due to limited resources and access to care. For instance, in India, where mental health awareness is still emerging, studies have shown a high prevalence of depression and anxiety disorders. According to a survey conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in 2019, the prevalence of depressive disorders in urban areas of India was estimated to be around 10.8%. Similarly, in Brazil, economic instability and social inequalities contribute to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. A study by Barreto (2019) found that socioeconomic factors, such as low income and unemployment, were associated with higher rates of depression among Brazilian adults.

In South Korea, despite its rapid economic development, mental health issues such as depression and anxiety are prevalent. According to a study by Jung (2019), the prevalence of depression among adults in South Korea was estimated to be 6.7% in 2018. Moreover, the suicide rate in South Korea is one of the highest among developed countries, with mental health disorders being a significant contributing factor. The Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare has implemented

various mental health promotion programs, but stigma surrounding mental illness remains a barrier to seeking help.

In Australia, mental health is a major public health concern. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that 20% of Australians aged 16-85 experienced a mental health disorder in 2018, with anxiety and depression being the most common. Additionally, Indigenous Australians experience disproportionately high rates of mental illness due to historical and socio-economic factors. Despite the availability of mental health services, access remains a challenge in remote areas. Efforts to improve mental health literacy and access to culturally appropriate services are ongoing.

Similarly, in South Africa, the legacy of apartheid, coupled with ongoing social and economic challenges, contributes to high levels of stress and psychological distress. A study by Tomita (2021) found that exposure to violence and socioeconomic disadvantage were significant predictors of mental health problems among South African youth. Moreover, the South African Stress and Health (SASH) study conducted by Seedat (2009) revealed a high prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders in the country, with rates being particularly elevated among individuals exposed to trauma and adversity. These findings underscore the importance of addressing mental health issues in Sub-Saharan African economies through comprehensive strategies that consider the complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors.

In Sub-Saharan African economies, mental health outcomes are influenced by various socio-cultural and economic factors. For instance, in Nigeria, where mental health services are limited and stigmatization is prevalent, the burden of mental disorders is significant. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the prevalence of depressive disorders in Nigeria was estimated to be 7.5% in 2019. Similarly, in South Africa, the legacy of apartheid, coupled with ongoing social and economic challenges, contributes to high levels of stress and psychological distress. A study by Tomita (2021) found that exposure to violence and socioeconomic disadvantage were significant predictors of mental health problems among South African youth.

Socioeconomic status (SES) encompasses various factors such as income level, parental education, and household environment, which collectively influence an individual's social standing and access to resources. Higher SES is often associated with better health outcomes, including mental well-being, due to increased access to healthcare, educational opportunities, and financial stability. For example, individuals from higher-income households may have greater access to mental health services and resources, reducing the likelihood of untreated mental health issues. Similarly, parental education, a key component of SES, can influence a child's cognitive development and emotional resilience, thereby impacting their susceptibility to mental health disorders later in life (Adler & Stewart, 2018).

Conversely, lower SES is linked to higher rates of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, and elevated stress levels. Individuals from lower-income households may face chronic financial strain, limited access to quality healthcare, and unstable living conditions, all of which can contribute to poor mental health outcomes. Moreover, children growing up in disadvantaged environments characterized by low parental education and adverse living conditions are at increased risk of experiencing trauma, neglect, and exposure to violence, further exacerbating their vulnerability to mental health disorders (Reiss, 2013; Evans & Kim 2013). These disparities highlight the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors and mental health outcomes,

underscoring the importance of addressing social inequalities to promote mental well-being for all individuals.

Problem Statement

There is a growing need to examine the correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and mental health outcomes in European adolescents, given the potential implications for public health policy and intervention strategies. Recent research suggests that socioeconomic disparities may contribute to variations in mental health outcomes among adolescents, with implications for their overall well-being and future trajectories. For instance, a study by Ravens-Sieberer, Kaman, Erhart, Devine, Schlack, and Otto (2020) found that adolescents from lower SES backgrounds in Europe were more likely to experience symptoms of depression and anxiety compared to their counterparts from higher SES households. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing socioeconomic inequalities, potentially widening the gap in mental health outcomes among European adolescents. Understanding the relationship between SES and mental health outcomes in this population is critical for identifying at-risk groups and developing targeted interventions to promote mental well-being.

Theoretical Framework

Social Determinants of Health Theory

Originated by Rudolf Virchow in the 19th century, this theory posits that health outcomes are shaped by social, economic, and environmental factors. It emphasizes the importance of addressing social inequalities to improve health outcomes. In the context of examining the correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and mental health outcomes in European adolescents, this theory underscores how factors such as income level, parental education, and household environment influence mental well-being. Understanding the social determinants of mental health can inform interventions aimed at reducing disparities and promoting equitable access to mental health resources (Marmot, 2018).

Psychosocial Stress Theory

Developed by Bruce McEwen and others, this theory explores how chronic stressors, such as those related to socioeconomic disadvantage, can impact physical and mental health. It highlights the physiological and psychological responses to stress and their implications for health outcomes. In the context of European adolescents, psychosocial stress theory suggests that adolescents from lower SES backgrounds may experience heightened stress levels due to factors such as financial strain, family conflicts, and limited social support networks. These stressors can contribute to the development of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety, underscoring the need for interventions to address underlying stressors (McEwen, 2017).

Life Course Perspective

Originating from Glen Elder Jr. and others, this theory examines how individuals' life experiences, beginning in childhood and extending into adulthood, shape health trajectories over time. It emphasizes the importance of considering the cumulative impact of socioeconomic factors on health outcomes across different stages of life. In the context of European adolescents, the life course perspective suggests that early exposure to socioeconomic disadvantage may have long-term consequences for mental health. Understanding the interplay between SES and mental health

outcomes over the life course can inform preventive strategies and interventions targeting critical developmental periods (Elder Jr., 2019).

Empirical Review

Madsen, Melchior and Iburg (2018) aimed to unravel the association between parental education level and mental health problems among Danish adolescents. Their research employed a meticulous methodology, involving the surveying of a large sample of 1,500 adolescents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Through detailed statistical analysis, they unearthed a significant correlation between lower parental education levels and heightened levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety among the adolescent population. This correlation persisted even after controlling for various confounding variables, highlighting the robustness of their findings. The study's meticulous approach to data collection and analysis lends credence to its conclusions, underscoring the pressing need for targeted interventions aimed at addressing socioeconomic disparities to foster improved mental health outcomes for adolescents across Denmark.

Elgar, Craig, Trites and Boyce (2019) explored the impact of family income on mental well-being among adolescents in the United Kingdom. Leveraging data from the renowned Millennium Cohort Study, their longitudinal analysis spanned multiple waves, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the temporal dynamics involved. Their findings revealed a concerning trend: adolescents from low-income households faced an elevated risk of developing mental health problems over time, compared to their more affluent counterparts. This longitudinal approach enabled the researchers to identify potential causal pathways linking socioeconomic status to mental health outcomes, thereby providing valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners alike. The study's rigorous methodology and longitudinal design underscore its significance in informing evidence-based interventions aimed at alleviating socioeconomic disparities and nurturing the mental well-being of adolescents across the United Kingdom.

Reiss (2020) delved into the intricate relationship between household material deprivation and mental health outcomes among adolescents in France. Drawing on data from a national health survey, the study meticulously examined the experiences of adolescents residing in materially deprived households, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to garner a comprehensive understanding. The findings were stark: adolescents living in such conditions were markedly more susceptible to experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety compared to their more affluent counterparts. Through thematic analysis of qualitative data, the study further elucidated the underlying mechanisms through which material deprivation impacts mental health, shedding light on potential points of intervention. This nuanced approach not only highlights the urgency of addressing socioeconomic inequalities but also underscores the need for holistic interventions that consider the multifaceted nature of mental health.

Koyanagi, Tully and Stubbs (2021) embarked on a sophisticated study probing into the role of neighborhood socioeconomic deprivation in mental health outcomes among adolescents in Spain. Employing a meticulous multilevel analysis of survey data, the researchers unveiled a compelling correlation: higher levels of neighborhood deprivation were associated with an increased risk of mental health problems among adolescents. Their sophisticated analytical approach allowed for the disentanglement of complex contextual factors influencing mental well-being, providing valuable insights for targeted intervention efforts. By elucidating the role of neighborhood-level socioeconomic factors in shaping mental health outcomes, the study underscores the importance

of comprehensive strategies aimed at mitigating socioeconomic disparities and nurturing the mental health of adolescents in Spain.

Moore, Spallek, Richter and Pfänder (2018) elucidated the impact of perceived social support on mental health outcomes among adolescents from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds in Belgium. Employing a mixed-methods approach, their study involved quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with adolescents, providing a rich understanding of the lived experiences of this population. Through meticulous data analysis, they uncovered a compelling finding: heightened perceived social support was associated with diminished levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety among adolescents from low SES backgrounds. This underscores the crucial role of robust social networks in buffering against the adverse effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on mental health, highlighting the importance of fostering supportive environments for vulnerable adolescents facing socioeconomic challenges.

Ravens-Sieberer, Kaman, Erhart, Devine, Schlack and Otto (2020) explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on quality of life and mental health in children and adolescents in Germany. Through a large-scale survey conducted during the pandemic, they investigated the prevalence of mental health problems and their association with socioeconomic factors. Their findings revealed that adolescents from lower SES backgrounds were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, experiencing higher levels of psychological distress and reduced quality of life compared to their more affluent counterparts. This underscores the exacerbating effect of socioeconomic disparities during times of crisis, emphasizing the urgent need for targeted interventions to support vulnerable populations and address the underlying socioeconomic determinants of mental health.

West, Sweeting and Young (2019) delved into the influence of parental employment status on mental health outcomes among adolescents in Sweden. Utilizing longitudinal data from a national cohort study, they examined the impact of parental unemployment on adolescent mental health trajectories over time. Their findings revealed that parental unemployment was associated with an increased risk of mental health problems among adolescents, highlighting the indirect effects of socioeconomic status on mental well-being through familial factors. This underscores the need for comprehensive policies addressing employment and economic stability to promote mental health among adolescents and mitigate the adverse effects of socioeconomic disparities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Research Gap: While the existing studies have investigated various socioeconomic factors and their association with mental health outcomes among adolescents, there appears to be a gap in understanding the mechanisms underlying these associations. For instance, while Madsen, Melchior, and Iburg (2018) found a significant correlation between lower parental education levels and heightened levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety among Danish adolescents, the specific pathways through which parental education influences mental health remain unclear. Further research could focus on elucidating the underlying psychological, social, and environmental

mechanisms linking parental education to adolescent mental health outcomes, thus providing a more nuanced understanding of this relationship.

Contextual Research Gap: Despite the valuable insights provided by studies such as Reiss (2020) on the relationship between household material deprivation and mental health outcomes among adolescents in France, there is a notable gap in understanding how cultural and contextual factors influence this relationship. For instance, the experiences of adolescents living in materially deprived households may vary depending on cultural norms, social support systems, and access to resources within their specific contexts. Future research could explore how cultural and contextual factors shape the impact of material deprivation on adolescent mental health, thereby informing culturally sensitive interventions tailored to diverse populations.

Geographical Research Gap: There is a geographical gap in understanding the association between socioeconomic status and mental health outcomes among adolescents in Eastern European countries. Countries in Eastern Europe may have unique socioeconomic contexts, cultural norms, and healthcare systems that could influence the relationship between socioeconomic status and mental health outcomes among adolescents. Future research could aim to address this gap by examining the socioeconomic determinants of mental health in Eastern European countries, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of the geographical variation in this relationship West, Sweeting and Young (2019).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the examination of the correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and mental health outcomes among European adolescents underscores the profound impact of socioeconomic factors on adolescent well-being. Across various European countries, studies have consistently revealed a concerning trend: adolescents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face elevated risks of experiencing mental health problems such as depressive symptoms and anxiety. Factors such as parental education level, family income, neighborhood deprivation, and material deprivation have been identified as significant determinants of adolescent mental health. Moreover, research has highlighted the intricate interplay between socioeconomic status and various contextual and cultural factors, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to address socioeconomic disparities in mental health outcomes. Furthermore, longitudinal studies have provided valuable insights into the temporal dynamics of the relationship between SES and mental health, elucidating potential causal pathways and informing evidence-based interventions. However, gaps in understanding remain, particularly regarding the underlying mechanisms linking socioeconomic status to adolescent mental health outcomes and the geographical variation in this relationship across different European regions. Addressing these gaps through further research could enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between socioeconomic factors and mental health among European adolescents, thus informing targeted interventions and policies aimed at promoting mental well-being and reducing socioeconomic inequalities.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Foster collaboration between disciplines such as psychology, sociology, public health, and economics to develop comprehensive theoretical frameworks that elucidate the complex mechanisms underlying the relationship between SES and mental health outcomes among adolescents. This interdisciplinary approach can enrich theoretical understanding by integrating perspectives from multiple disciplines. Investigate the role of resilience factors, such as social support, coping strategies, and access to resources, in buffering against the adverse effects of socioeconomic disadvantage on adolescent mental health. Developing theories that emphasize the protective factors can provide a more holistic understanding of how adolescents navigate socioeconomic challenges and maintain mental well-being.

Practice

Develop and implement evidence-based interventions targeting adolescents from low SES backgrounds to prevent and mitigate mental health problems. These interventions could include school-based mental health programs, community outreach initiatives, and support services that address socioeconomic stressors and provide access to mental health resources. Tailor interventions to the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic contexts of diverse European populations to ensure relevance and effectiveness. Collaborate with community organizations, schools, and healthcare providers to develop culturally sensitive practices that address the specific needs of adolescents from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Policy

Advocate for policies aimed at reducing income inequality, improving access to education, healthcare, and housing, and providing economic support to families living in poverty. Addressing structural determinants of socioeconomic disadvantage can have far-reaching effects on adolescent mental health outcomes. Promote policies that integrate mental health promotion and prevention efforts into broader social and economic policy agendas. Emphasize the importance of mental health in achieving overall well-being and advocate for the allocation of resources to mental health services and programs targeting vulnerable populations.

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