

Discrimination, integration and self-perceived mental health among immigrants in Italy

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Background

The increasing number of immigrants in Italy (8,3% in 2015; $n = 5,073,000$), has often created difficulty in social and workplace context, with consequence for immigrants' physical and mental health status. Our study investigated the role of discrimination and integration on immigrants' self-perceived mental health in Italy.

Methods

We analyzed a sample of immigrants resident in Italy ($n = 25,326$), obtained from 'Multipurpose survey on households with foreigners: social conditions and integration of foreign citizen', conducted by ISTAT (2011-2012). The survey collected information about demography, socioeconomic status, migratory pathway, discrimination and integration, work history, health status, health services use. Self-perceived mental health status was measured through mental component summary (MCS) of SF-12 questionnaire, assuming 10th percentile as cut-off for worse health status. Multivariate logistic models were performed using: MCS as outcome; discrimination at work, self-perceived loneliness, satisfaction about life as determinants; age, gender, educational level, area of origin and length of stay in Italy, as potential confounders.

Results

48.9% were males, mean age was 31.6 (SD = 18.3), 25.2% had low educational level, median length of stay in Italy was 8 (IRQ:6-13) years. They came from Europe (65.5%), Africa (17.3%), Asia (11.8%), America (5.4%). Higher risk of poor self-perceived mental health was observed for immigrants who declared to have suffered discrimination at work (OR = 2.02; 95%CI:1.77-2.30), self-perceived loneliness (OR = 3.05; 95%CI:2.71-3.44), low life-satisfaction (OR = 2.72; 95%CI:2.44-3.04).

Conclusions

Our findings confirm that mental health status among immigrants in Italy is affected by workplace discrimination. Social policies aimed at improving integration should be implemented. Results on self-perceived loneliness encourages initiatives to improve social inclusion policies.

Discrimination as predictor of mental health problems and mental health service utilisation among migrants

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Background

Migrants are often confronted with discrimination. This might be an additional risk factor leading to a higher prevalence of mental health problems. We decided to investigate whether discrimination (as perceived) is a risk factor for mental health problems and as such predicts mental health service utilisation.

Methods

We used data from the 2nd Dutch National Survey of General Practice. Besides the main sample from the indigenous population an additional random sample ($N = 1,339$) was drawn from the four largest migrant groups in the Netherlands. We used only data from this additional sample. The survey contained questions on mental health care utilisation and indicators of mental health problems. Discrimination was measured by three questions (on scape-goating, treatment by governmental agencies, problems at work) combined in a Likert scale. Language mastery and acculturation (indicating modern vs. traditional normative beliefs) were also part of the survey. Regression analyses were used to predict mental health problems and mental health care utilisation.

Results

Perceived discrimination was negatively related to positive mental health ($\beta = -2.99$) and positively to anxiety and depression ($\beta = .07$). This was also the case when possible confounders (language mastery and acculturation) were added to the model. Perceived discrimination appeared to be predictive of mental health service utilization (OR = 1.40). Acculturation had an independent (positive) effect on utilisation (OR = 1.99). Discrimination as perceived among migrants with modern normative beliefs, seems to have a slightly lowering effect on utilisation (OR = .83) (not significant).

Conclusions

Perceived discrimination is a risk factor for mental health problems. In general this leads to more mental health service utilisation. Whether this leads to a reduction of help seeking behaviour among migrants with modern normative beliefs, deserves additional research.