

Use of Mental Health Care Services by People with Depression in Germany: a Secondary Data Analysis

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Introduction

According to epidemiologic studies, depression is one of the most frequent mental disorders in Germany. Based on the secondary data of three statutory health insurers and the German Pension Fund, the utilization of mental healthcare services of people with depression was analyzed.

Objectives

The analyses describe the utilization of in- and outpatient mental health care services of people with depression by different disciplines and utilization patterns overtime (pathways of care).

Aim

The main aim was to analyze mental healthcare utilization of people with depression in Germany in 2005–2007 in order to identify areas of potential optimization of mental health care.

Methods

Secondary data of three statutory health insurance companies and of the German Pension Funds of the years 2005-2007 were used for these analyses. The analyses are based on 1,435,133 persons with at least one diagnosis of a depression (F32/F33) in 2005-2007.

Results

The majority (73 %) of depression diagnoses were classified as “unspecified”. For both inpatients and outpatients, a considerable proportion of care for mental illnesses was provided by primary care physicians/other specialists in somatic medicine. Analyses of the pathways of care of people with severe depression revealed low levels of collaboration between primary and specialized care as well as outpatient and inpatient treatment.

Conclusions

Setting aside boundaries between different disciplines and sectors, the use of secondary data can, despite its limitations, contribute to the detection of under- and overdiagnosis, mistaken allocation, and intersectoral interface problems.