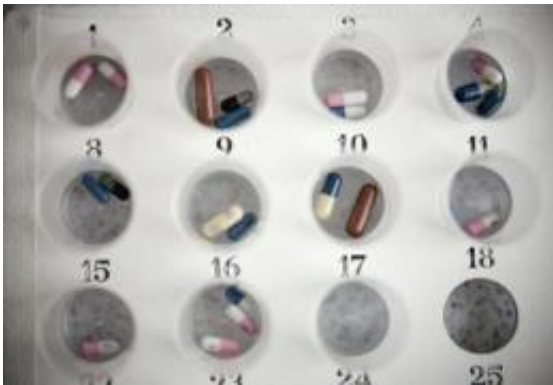


# Mental illnesses are second leading cause of time off work in Spain

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Mental illnesses are the second leading cause of temporary and permanent sick leave, after osteomuscular complaints. Credit: SINC

An interdisciplinary team coordinated by researchers from the University of Castilla La Mancha (UCLM) and the Canary Islands Health Service has evaluated the economic impact of mental illness in Spain, and estimated their social cost. According to the study, despite health resources being invested to alleviate the effects of such illnesses, informal care and lost work time places a heavy burden on society.

Mental illnesses affect a large number of people, impact on their quality of life and have high socioeconomic costs. "The three disease groups that the National Health System spends most on in Spain are cancer, circulatory system diseases and mental illnesses", Juan Oliva, lead author of the study and a researcher at the UCLM, tells SINC.

The study, published recently in the *European Journal of Health Economics*, shows that mental illnesses are the second leading cause of temporary and permanent sick leave, after osteomuscular complaints.

In addition, people suffering from mental illnesses are the fourth most likely to receive informal care (provided by non-professional carers, usually families), following those who have suffered strokes and heart attacks, dementia and osteomuscular disease.

The objective of the study was to estimate the socioeconomic impact of this kind of disease in Spain, based on data from 2002, the year with the greatest number of recorded sources. The latest figures, published on the Ministry of Health's website, are from 2006, but these are not broken down by disease type.

In addition to using normal units of evaluation, such as the number of [premature deaths](#) caused by mental disease, numbers of hospitalisations, doctor's visits and time off work, the team also included another indicator in their study - direct non-medical costs, in other words the costs assumed by those caring for people who have lost their autonomy to some degree as a result of a [mental illness](#).

Although Spain's autonomous region and central governments direct financial and human resources to the prevention and treatment of mental illnesses (as can be seen in estimated healthcare expenditure figures), "the hidden social cost (lost employment and the cost of informal care) represents an even bigger social burden", explains Oliva.

## Other figures and percentages

The total cost of mental illnesses in Spain in 2002 has been estimated to be at least €7.019 billion, with direct medical costs accounting for 39.6% of this amount, representing at least 7.3% of total public

healthcare costs in Spain that year.

According to the research, direct costs resulting from mental illnesses represented 57.3% of the total estimated cost, with the remaining 42.7% representing the loss in workplace productivity.

In terms of direct medical costs, the most significant expenditure resulted from hospitalisations (19.1% of total estimated cost) and drugs (15.6% of total estimated cost). Overall, total expenditure in 2002 represented almost 1% of Spain's gross domestic product (GDP).

**More information:** Juan Oliva Moreno, Julio López Bastida, Ángel Luís Montejo-González, Rubén Osuna-Guerrero, Beatriz Duque-González. "The socioeconomic costs of mental illness in Spain" EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF HEALTH ECONOMICS 10 (4):361-369, Oct 2009.

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