

10% of middle-aged Europeans are on antidepressants, research shows

June 20 2011

New research from the University of Warwick and the IZA Institute in Bonn shows that 10% of middle-aged Europeans took antidepressants in 2010. The researchers looked in detail at the lives of a randomly selected sample of nearly 30,000 Europeans. The study covered 27 countries.

Andrew Oswald, an economics professor at the University of Warwick, and co-author of the study, described the results as concerning, he said: “[Antidepressants](#) are a relatively new kind of commodity. We are only starting to get proper data on who takes them. But as we live in the richest and safest era in the history of humans, perhaps we are going to have to ask ourselves why one in ten of Europe’s middle-aged citizens need a pill to cope with life. That is an awful lot of people relying on chemical happiness.”

In detail, the authors of the report find:

- (i) One in thirteen of adult European citizens -- and 10% of middle-aged [Europeans](#) -- took an antidepressant in the previous twelve months;
- (ii) The rates of antidepressant use are markedly greatest in Portugal, but also noticeably higher than the European norm in Lithuania, France and the UK;
- (iii) The probability of taking an antidepressant is greatest among those middle-aged, female, unemployed, with low levels of education, and divorced or separated;

(iv) A strong hill-shaped age pattern is found -- both for males and females and in Western and Eastern Europe -- that peaks in people's late 40s. The study adjusts for whether individuals have young children, so children are not the cause of the midlife low in well-being.

(v) This pattern is consistent with, and independently helps corroborate, the recent finding across the world that happiness and mental health follow an approximate U-shape through life. The scientific explanation for that midlife low is still unknown.

The new study, "[Antidepressants and Age](#)", by David G. Blanchflower and Andrew J. Oswald, can be downloaded from this page and as a Discussion Paper from the Publications section of the IZA Institute site.

Provided by University of Warwick

Citation: 10% of middle-aged Europeans are on antidepressants, research shows (2011, June 20) retrieved 20 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-06-middle-aged-europeans-antidepressants.html>

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