

3. HEALTH WORKFORCE

3.7. Psychiatrists

At any point in time, about 10% of the adult population will report having some type of mental or behavioural disorder (WHO, 2001). People with mental health problems may receive help from a variety of professionals, including general practitioners, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists, social workers, specialist nurses and others. In Europe, a population-based survey carried out in 2005-06 indicated that, on average across EU countries, 13% of the population reported seeking help from a health professional for a psychological or emotional health problem over the past year (*Eurobarometer*, 2006). Among the people who sought help, two-thirds (67%) had consulted a general practitioner, while 15% sought help from a psychiatrist and another 15% from a psychologist (Figure 3.7.3).

This section focuses on one category of mental health service provider, psychiatrists, as the availability of comparable data on others, such as psychologists, is more limited. Psychiatrists are responsible for diagnosing and treating a variety of serious mental health problems, including depression, learning disabilities, alcoholism and drug addiction, eating disorders, and personality disorders such as schizophrenia. The number of psychiatrists in most OECD countries is between 10 and 20 per 100 000 population. The number is highest in Switzerland, some Nordic countries (Iceland and Norway) and France. It is the lowest in Turkey, Korea, Poland, Hungary and Spain (Figure 3.7.1).

The number of psychiatrists per capita has increased since 1995 in most OECD countries for which data are available. The rise has been particularly rapid in Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany and Austria. On the other hand, there has been no increase in the number of psychiatrists per capita in France, Hungary, Portugal and the United States since 1995 (Figure 3.7.2). In France, most of the increase happened in the 1970s.

As is the case for many other medical specialties, psychiatrists may be unevenly distributed across regions within each country, with some regions being

underserved. For example, in Australia, the number of psychiatrists per capita is seven times greater in major cities than in remote regions (AIHW, 2008b).

The role of psychiatrists varies across countries. A country like Spain has deliberately chosen to use psychiatrists to work in close co-operation with general practitioners (GPs). Hence, although the number of psychiatrists is relatively low, consultation rates of psychiatrists by people with mental disorders are higher than in other countries where the number of psychiatrists is higher, because of higher referral rates from their GPs (Kovess-Masfety, 2007).

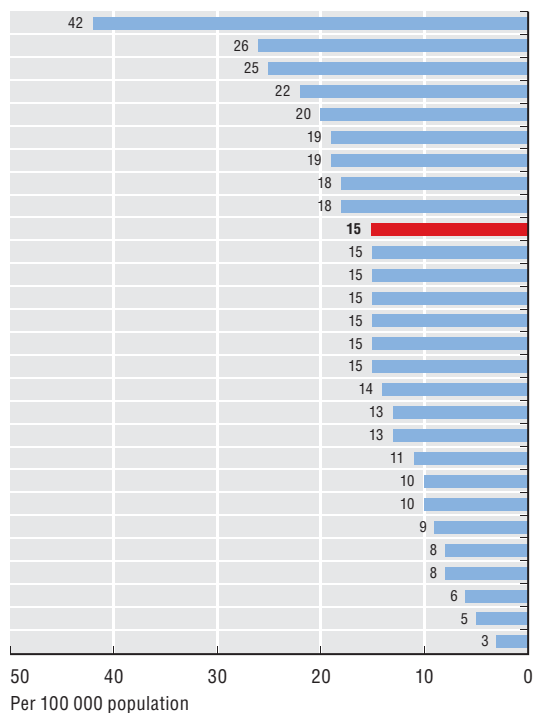
The role of other mental health service providers such as psychologists also varies across countries. For instance, in the Netherlands, there is a high number of psychologists who are very active in providing services that are covered under health insurance systems. In other countries such as France, the number of psychologists is lower and the services that they provide are not covered under public health insurance (Kovess-Masfety, 2007).

Definition and deviations

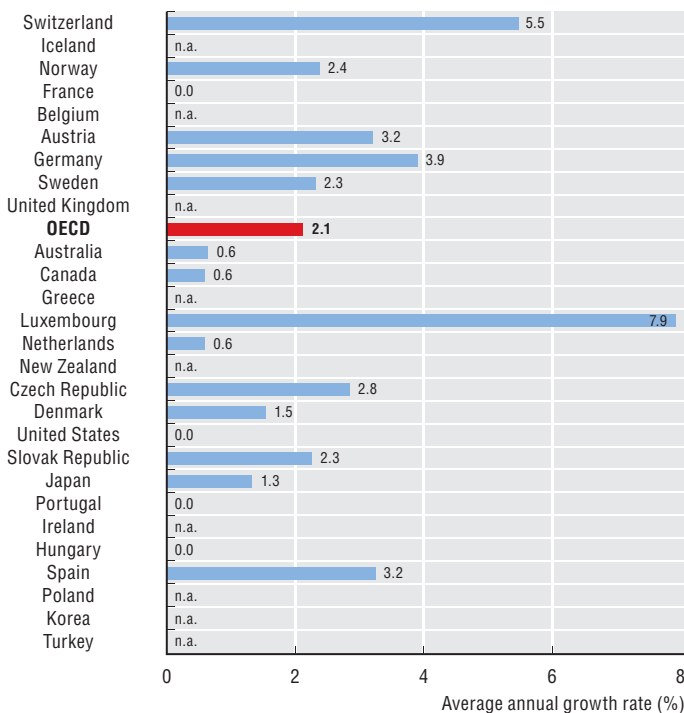
Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialize in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. They have post-graduate training in psychiatry, and may also have additional training in a psychiatric specialty, such as neuropsychiatry and child psychiatry. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication, which psychologists cannot do in most countries.

The figures normally include psychiatrists, neuropsychiatrists and child psychiatrists. Psychologists are excluded. The numbers are presented as head counts, regardless of whether psychiatrists work full-time or part-time.

3.7.1 Psychiatrists per 100 000 population, 2007 (or latest year available)

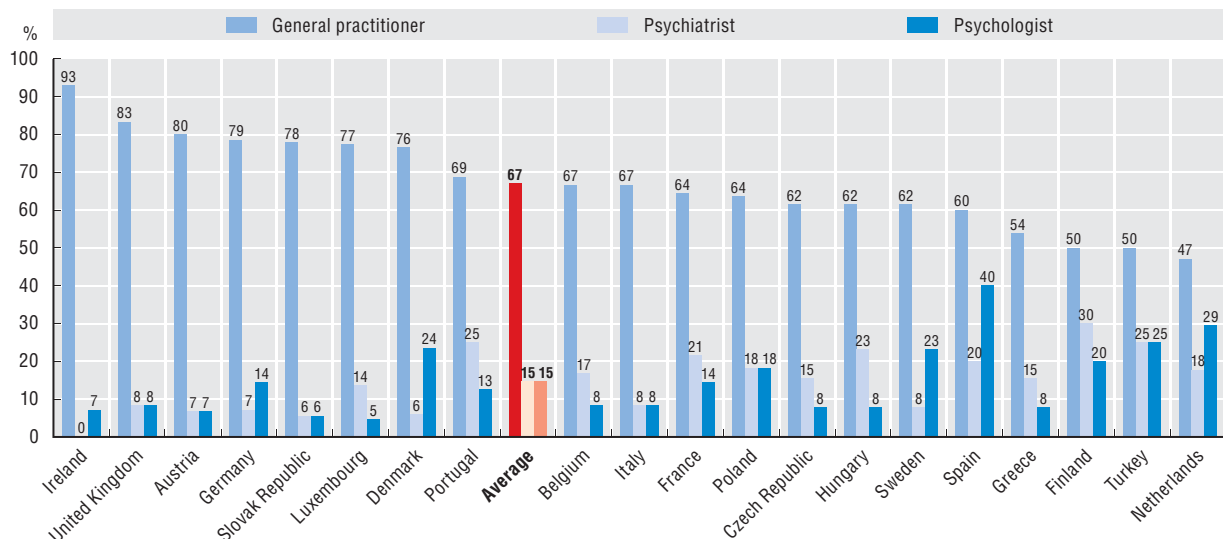


3.7.2 Change in the number of psychiatrists per 100 000 population, 1995-2007 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Data 2009.

3.7.3 Type of provider(s) consulted for mental health problems, selected EU countries, 2005-06



Note: The question asked during the interview was: "In the last 12 months, did you seek help from a professional in respect of a psychological or emotional health problem? If yes, indicate who in the provided list." Multiple answers were possible for the second part of the question.

Source: Eurobarometer, December 2005-January 2006.



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