



## Rates of depression increase by a fifth for people aged 50-70

### European survey

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Rates of depression increase by up to 20 per cent between the ages of 50 and 75, according to preliminary findings from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE).

The survey, which looked at 22,000 people in 11 countries, found that in northern European countries, depression in men increased from 10-15 per cent at age 50 to 20-25 per cent at age 75 while depression in females increased from 20-25 per cent at age 50 to 35-40 per cent at age 70.

In southern European countries, the prevalence of depression in men increased from 10-20 per cent at age 50 to 30-40 per cent at age 75 and in women from 30-40 per cent at age 50 to 50-70 per cent by age 75. In all the 11 European countries surveyed, more women than men suffered from depression.

Commenting on the results, Sandra Hogan of Aware said increasing rates of depression in older people may be due to people living longer. She also acknowledged that certain aspects of their lives may contribute to depressive symptoms. "Depression is not a natural part of getting older so people shouldn't expect to be depressed. But, the increased likelihood of losing loved ones, loss of parenting role, retirement and the loss of independence can lead to depression in later life," said Ms Hogan.

She also said depression was nothing to be ashamed of and that older people should accept offers of help if they were suffering from depression. "Depression affects people of all ages and from all backgrounds. There is no shame in it at all. Older people or their carers should be encouraged to seek help if they are suffering from depression."

Worldwide, depression is forecast to rise from the fourth to the second most burdensome health condition and late-life depression is currently believed

to affect 10-15 per cent of the over-65 population.

Disability associated with declining health in older age is considered to be a major determinant in the numbers of sufferers and the duration of depression in older people. Not being married and living alone are also factors linked to depression.

The survey has recently expanded the number of participating countries and researchers in Ireland will begin collecting data on the physical and psychological health of those over 50 in September.

Information on employment, volunteering, relationships with family members and friends will also be surveyed.

"Ultimately, the results of the study - which will be available in 2007 - may be used as

quality-of-life indicators in the development of future EU policy for older people," said Dr Liam Delaney, research fellow at the University College Dublin Geary Institute.

Prof Colm Harmon, director of the Geary Institute, is the principal investigator of the Irish research team which includes researchers from the Geary Institute and the UCD School of Public Health.

◆ See [www.share-project.org](http://www.share-project.org)