The impact of the economic crisis on the mental health of Portuguese primary-school children

Diogo Costa1 | Marina Cunha2 | Cláudia Ferreira3 | Augusta Gama1,3 | Aristides M. Machado-Rodrigues1,4 | Vítor Rosado-Marques1,3 | Helena Nogueira1,6 | Maria-Raquel G. Silva1,7 | Cristina Pades1

1 CIAS - Research Centre for Anthropology and Health, Department of Life Sciences, University of Coimbra; 2 CINEICC - Centre for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive and Behavioral Intervention, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Coimbra; 3 Department of Animal Biology, Faculty of Sciences, Lisbon University; 4 High School of Education, Polytechnic Institute of Viseu; 5 Faculty of Human Kinetics, University of Lisbon; 6 Department of Geography and Tourism, University of Coimbra; 7 Faculty of Health Sciences, University Fernando Pessoa.

* diogo.costa@uc.pt (corresponding author)

BACKGROUND

• The 2008 global economic crisis has affected southern European societies unprecedentedly, with varied effects.
• Governmental austerity measures implemented had a negative impact on the adult population mental health, but less is known about children mental health.

AIM

• This study aims to measure the impact on Portuguese children’s mental health of specific changes in family life during the crisis.

METHODS

• Cross-sectional analysis of children (aged 7.5-11 years old, n=1157, 52.1% girls), conducted in 118 public and private schools of three Portuguese districts during 2016/2017.
• Parent reports of child’s psychosocial functioning: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire – SDQ
• Children self-reports of depression, anxiety and stress symptoms: Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales, Children version – DASS–C
• Children health-related quality of life (HRQoL): KIDSCREEN-27
• General linear regression models were fitted to estimate mean scores of mental health outcomes according to each answer, adjusted for age, sex, socioeconomic status and district.

DURING THE ECONOMIC CRISIS, DID YOU:

• Have to use savings? (48.6%)
• Have to resort to grandparents other family to help with food? (20.3%)
• Have to resort to official entities to help with food (Charity, Food Bank, Other Associations)? (4.3%)
• Have to change to more economic housing? (6.8%)
• Have to stop buying some food item that you used to consume? (21.6%)
• Start buying cheaper food? (34.2%)
• Did not change our habits? (38.4%)
• Have to cut some entertainment (e.g. Cable TV, internet)? (9.3%)

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean SDQ total scores according to changes during the crisis</th>
<th>Mean score of Depressive symptoms (DASS-C) according to changes during the crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean score of Anxiety symptoms (DASS-C) according to changes during the crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean score of the Physical Well-Being dimension according to changes during crisis (Health-related quality of life - KIDSCREEN-27)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CONCLUSIONS

• Changes in family food consumption and the financial constraint attributed to the economic crisis were associated with poorer psychosocial functioning, more common mental health symptoms and worse HRQoL, in primary school-aged children.
• Early-life determinants of inequalities in children mental health must be tackled, particularly among those exposed to the 2008 global economic crisis.

FUNDING: This study was supported by a grant from Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia, Portugal, reference: PTDC/DTP-SAP/3532/2014. Projecto co-financiado pelo COMPETE 2020, Portugal 2020 - Programa Operacional Competitividade e Internacionalização (POCI), União Europeia através do Fundo Europeu de Desenvolvimento Regional (FEDER) e Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia (FCT).