

Report on immigrants' health status and determinants in Spain: National Health Surveys 2006-12

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Background:

Foreign population growth occurred in Spain has generated great interest for the health needs of this population. CIBERESP Immigration and Health Program is producing a report aimed at analyzing the evolution of the health status and determinants of immigrants compared to the Spanish population.

Methods:

A cross-sectional study was performed using data from the Spanish National Health Survey 2006 (n=29,478) and 2012 (n=21,007). Variables analyzed included social determinants, general health, mental health, occupational health, cardiovascular risk factors, use of medicines and access to health care and preventive services. Age-standardised proportions were calculated by survey year, sex, birthplace (Spain versus less advanced economies, and by regions of origin), social class (manual or non-manual occupation) and years of residence in Spain (less or more than 10 years).

Results:

Immigrants were more likely to be in manual social classes (83%, Spanish-born 61%) and in 2012, 29% had resided more than 10 years in Spain. Immigrants - especially men with shorter length of residence - reported fewer chronic conditions than natives. However, they were more likely to report poor self-rated health (2012, immigrants: men 20%, women 28%; natives: men 17%, women 22%) and poor mental health, although differences in men disappeared when stratifying by social class. In 2012, the prevalence of mental health and consumption of tranquilizers and antidepressants increased in immigrant men and decreased in women compared to 2006. Immigrants were less likely than Spanish-born to have checked blood pressure and cholesterol. In both 2006 and 2012, immigrants were less likely than Spanish-born to smoke, and immigrant men were less likely and women more likely to be obese than Spanish-born.

Conclusion:

This report is an opportunity to increase knowledge and raise awareness of the health status of immigrants compared with the Spanish population and to identify areas where further research is needed.