

Financial Hardship and Psychological Distress in Australia: The Moderating Role of Area-Level Socio-Economic Disadvantage

An Abstract of the Thesis by
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The prevalence of mental illness globally, including within Australia, has remained unchanged for three decades. Paradoxically, this is despite vast increases in mental health expenditure, treatment provision and reinforcing of the mental health workforce during this time. Thus, some researchers are beginning to question why increased treatment has failed to catalyse a reduced global prevalence of mental illness. Very broadly, the present research questions whether a failure to adequately address social and economic determinants of mental health may account for this gap. More specifically, this study analysed two waves of the 2015 and 2017 HILDA Survey, comprising 13,530 respondents, to explore the relationship between financial hardship and psychological distress in a nationally representative Australian cohort. Moreover, this study investigated the extent to which area-level socio-economic disadvantage moderates this relationship, while controlling for a range of associated socio-demographic characteristics using a series of multivariable logistic regression models. Thus, this study contained three primary aims – to confirm the unadjusted relationship between financial hardship and psychological distress; to estimate the strength of the adjusted relationship between financial hardship and psychological distress; and to examine the extent to which area-level disadvantage moderates the adjusted relationship. Financial hardship was confirmed to be strongly associated with psychological distress in both unadjusted and adjusted analyses. However, no evidence was found to suggest that area-level socio-economic disadvantage moderates the relationship between financial hardship and psychological distress.