

Back pain as a cause of long-term disability compared to all other disease groups in Greek general adult population

Alexandros Andrianakos, Spyros Aslanides, for the ESORDIG Study Group
Hellenic Foundation for Rheumatological Research, Athens, Greece

Objective: To estimate the prevalence of long-term disability (LTD) associated with back pain, including low back pain and neck pain, in comparison to LTD associated with all other disease groups in the general adult population, was one of the aims of an epidemiological study of rheumatic diseases in Greece (ESORDIG study).

Methods: This cross-sectional study was conducted on the total adult population (> 18-years-old) of 2 urban, one suburban and 4 rural communities (8,547 subjects), as well as on 2,100 out of 5,686 randomly selected adults in an additional suburban and rural community. The study, based on a standardized questionnaire, clinical evaluation and laboratory investigation when necessary, was carried out by rheumatologists who visited the target population at their homes. The questionnaire included distinct questions about LTD, which was defined as “the limitation of occupational or any other activities because of a chronic physical or mental disorder, compared to others of the same age and sex, in good health”.

Results: The participation rate in the study was 82.1%. The age and sex adjusted prevalence of back pain in the total target general population was 14.3% (95% CI 13.7-14.9), while that of LTD associated with back pain was 1.8% (95% CI 1.6-2.0). The age and sex adjusted prevalence of LTD associated with back pain was significantly higher among women (2.0%, 95% CI 1.7-2.3) than men (1.6%, 95% CI 1.3-1.9) ($p < 0.03$), and increased with age from 0.8% in the 19-44 year-old group to 3.1% in the group aged >64 years ($p < 0.0005$). The overall age and sex adjusted prevalence of LTD associated with any disorder in the general population was 9.2% (95% CI 10.3-11.8). Concerning the causes of LTD, back pain was the third most common cause (19.6%), following the groups of other rheumatic diseases (27.6%) and cardiovascular diseases (21.7%), but the difference was statistically significant when compared only to the first most common cause (percentage difference 8.0, 95% CI 4.8-11.2). Analysis by age group showed that in the 19-44 year-old group, back pain was the first most common cause of LTD (24.5%), differing significantly from the second (psychiatric disorders, 15.3%) (percentage difference 9.2, 95% CI 1.7-16.7); in the 45-64 year-old group back pain was the second most common cause of LTD (25.3%), following the group of other rheumatic diseases (30.4%), while in the group aged >64 years back pain ranked third (12.9%) as a cause of LTD.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that back pain, compared to all other disease groups, is the third most common cause of long-term disability in the general adult population. However, among young adults (<45-year-old), back pain is the first most common cause of long-term disability.

Members of the ESORDIG Study Group: F. Christoyannis, P. Dantis, A. Georgountzos, D. Karamitsos, E. Kaskani, G. Kaziolas, L. Kontelis, P. Krachtis, Z. Nikolia, K. Pantelidou, E. Tavaniotou, P. Trontzas, E. Vafiadou, C. Voudouris.

Disclosure: A. Andrianakos, None; S. Aslanides, None.