

BACK PAIN AS A CAUSE OF SHORT-TERM DISABILITY COMPARED TO ALL OTHER DISEASE GROUPS IN GREEK ADULT GENERAL POPULATION

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Objectives: To assess the prevalence of short-term disability (STD) caused by back pain, including low back pain and neck pain, or any other disorder was one of the aims of a cross-sectional population-based epidemiological study of rheumatic diseases in Greece (ESORDIG study).

Methods: The ESORDIG study was conducted in 2 urban, 2 suburban and 5 rural communities, located in north, central and south Greece, and having a total adult population of 14,233 subjects. All adult (>18-years-old) residents of 2 urban, one suburban and 4 rural communities (8,547 subjects) were included in the study, as well as 2,100 out of 5,686 randomly selected adults of one suburban (1:3) and one rural (1:2) community. Thus, the final total target adult population of the study was 10,647 subjects. The study was performed by experienced rheumatologists who visited the target population at home either from door-to-door or after an appointment, and was based on a standardized questionnaire, clinical evaluation and laboratory investigation, when necessary. The questionnaire included distinct questions about STD, which was defined as “staying in bed or the restriction of usual physical or occupational activities for one or more days because of any disorder during the 2-week period prior to the interview”.

Results: Of the final total target adult population, 8,740 subjects participated in the study (response rate 82.1%). The age and sex adjusted prevalence of back pain in the total target general population was 14.3% (95% CI 13.8-14.8), while that of STD due to back pain was 1.7% (95% CI 1.5-1.9). The age and sex adjusted prevalence of STD due to back pain was significantly higher among women (2.1%, 95% CI 1.9-2.3) than men (1.3%, 95% CI 1.1-1.5) ($p<0.0005$), and increased with age, being 1.1% and 2.3% in the 19-44 and 45-64 year-old groups, respectively ($p<0.0005$), while reached a plateau after the age of 64 years (2.2%). The overall age and sex adjusted prevalence of STD due to any disorder in the general population was 10.8% (95% CI 10.3-11.8). Concerning the causes of STD, back pain was the second most common cause (16%), sharing this position with cardiovascular diseases (16%), and the difference was significant as compared to the first most common cause (respiratory diseases, 21.2%) ($p<0.001$), or to the third one (other rheumatic diseases, 10.4%) ($p<0.0005$). Analysis for sex and age showed that in women and the 19-44 year-old group back pain was the first (21.6%) most common cause of STD.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that back pain, compared to all other disease groups, is the second most common cause of short-term disability in the adult general population, sharing this position with cardiovascular diseases. However, among young adult females (<45-year-old), back pain is the first most common cause of short-term disability.