

BACK PAIN AS A CAUSE OF PHYSICIAN OFFICE VISITS COMPARED TO ALL OTHER MAJOR DISEASE GROUPS IN THE GENERAL ADULT POPULATION OF GREECE

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Objectives: To assess the frequency of physician office visits (POV) due to back pain compared with other major disease groups in the general adult population was one of the aims of a cross-sectional population based epidemiological study of the rheumatic diseases in Greece (ESORDIG study)¹.

Methods: The study was conducted on the total adult population (>18 years) of 7 communities (8,547 subjects) located in north, central and south Greece, as well as on 2,100 out of 5,686 randomly selected subjects in an additional 2 communities. 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 a distinct question about POV due to back pain (including low back pain and neck pain) or to any other disorder during the 2-week period immediately prior to the interview.

Results: The participation rate in the study was 82.1%. The age and sex adjusted rate of POV due to back pain in the total target general adult population was 1.4% (95% CI 1.2-1.6), and was significantly higher among women (1.7%) than men (1.2%) ($p<0.008$), while increasing with age from 0.8% in the 19-44 year-old group to 2.1% in the group aged >64 years ($p<0.0005$). The overall age and sex adjusted rate of POV due to any disorder in the total target general population was 13.6% (95% CI 13.0-14.2). Regarding the causes of POV, back pain was the fourth most common cause (10.4%), following cardiovascular diseases (18.2%), respiratory diseases (14.0%) and endocrine-metabolic diseases (11.1%). Analysis by age group showed that in the 19-44 year-old group, back pain was the second most common cause of POV (12.1%), differing significantly from the first (respiratory diseases, 17.3%) (percentage difference 5.2, 95% CI 0.7-9.7), but not from the third most common cause (digestive diseases, 9.8). In the 45-64 year-old group, back pain was the third most common cause of POV (11.8%), following cardiovascular (17.8%) and respiratory diseases (13.3%), while in the group aged >64 years back pain ranked fifth (7.8%) as a cause of POV.

Conclusion: These findings demonstrate that back pain, in comparison with all other major disease groups, ranks fourth as a cause of physician office visits in the general adult population, but second or third in the 19-44 and 45-64 year-old groups, respectively; nearly one out of 8 subjects under the age of 65 years visiting physicians is suffering from back pain.

References: 1. Andrianakos A, Trontzas P, Christoyiannis F, Dantis P, Voudouris C, Georgountzos A, et al. Prevalence of rheumatic diseases in Greece: A cross-sectional population-based epidemiological study. The ESORDIG study. *J Rheumatol* 2003;30:1589-1601.

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