The prevalence of neck pain: a population-based study from northern Sweden.


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FROM ABSTRACT

The two northernmost counties in Sweden form together 1 of the 39 collaborating centers in the World Health Organization (WHO) MONICA (MONItoring of trends and determinants in Cardiovascular disease) project.

At the last survey in 1999, we added some questions about cervical spine complaints. Persons randomly selected from the population in a geographically well-defined area completed a self-administered questionnaire. The sample included 8,356 subjects and 6,000(72%) of them answered.

43% of the population reported neck pain, more women(48%) than men(38%).

Women of working age had more neck pain than older ones, a phenomenon not seen among men.

Chronic neck pain, defined as continuous pain of more than 6 months' duration, was more common in women(22%) than men(16%).

More than one fourth of the cases with chronic symptoms had a history of neck or head trauma and one third of these had sustained a whiplash type of injury.

Thus, all types of neck trauma seem to be associated with chronic neck pain.

THESE AUTHORS ALSO NOTE:

The frequency of neck pain is quite high and greatly affects the person’s quality of life.

Neck problems cause a large proportion of occupational illness and disability.

“It is disputed whether a whiplash type of trauma is a major pathogenetic factor for the development of chronic neck pain.”

These authors assessed the prevalence of non-traumatic and traumatic neck pain, in a randomly selected population in northern Sweden.
The cervical spine questions used in the study were:

1. Have you visited a doctor because of a neck or head injury?
2. If yes, was it due to whiplash injury; other neck injury; head injury?
3. If you have neck pain, how long have you had symptoms?
   Last week
   Last 6 months
   More than 6 months
4. If you have neck pain, how often do you have symptoms?
   Continuously
   Some times every month
   A few times every year

“Patients seeking medical attention after a cervical spine injury with persistent posttraumatic complaints were defined as having injury-related neck pain.”

Chronic neck pain was defined as continuous neck complaints for more than 6 months.

RESULTS

43 % of the population reported neck pain: women 48%, men 38%. [WOW]

Women over age 65 had less frequent neck pain than younger women. [This is important as I have been involved in many cases where insurance companies blame neck pain on old age.]

“43% of women and 33% of men reported neck pain with a duration exceeding 6 months.”

“Thus, most persons had had neck pain for a long time.”

About half of these had continuous symptoms: 17% of men and 23% in women.

“5.2% of the total population with chronic neck pain had a history of trauma to the cervical spine.”

“The prevalence of whiplash injuries in the total population was 3%.”
DISCUSSION

“Musculoskeletal complaints have been reported to account for 90% of the painful disorders in the population and the neck-shoulder area was the commonest site of pain.”

“The prevalence of all kinds of neck pain in the population was 43%.” This prevalence is similar to 3 other studies cited by the authors.

“More than one fourth of all cases with chronic neck pain had a history of a neck/head trauma and nearly one third of these had sustained a whiplash type of injury.”

“Half of those who reported that they had sustained a whiplash or another type of neck injury had chronic neck pain.”

“Thus, a positive association was found between a history of trauma and neck pain.”

“These findings are contrary to the results of a retrospective questionnaire-based study from Lithuania (Schräder et al. 1996).”

“Our finding that chronic neck pain is not uncommon in young people has been noted by others. Thus, pain is not exclusively a symptom of aging.” [IMPORTANT]

“The over-all prevalence of all types of neck pain and of chronic neck pain was higher in females.”

“All types of neck trauma, not only whiplash injury, seem to be associated with chronic neck pain.”

KEY POINTS FROM DAN MURPHY

(1) Musculoskeletal complaints account for 90% of the painful disorders in the population and the neck-shoulder complaints are the most common region.

(2) Trauma, especially whiplash trauma, causes chronic neck pain.

(3) Women suffer more neck pain and chronic neck pain than men.

(4) Older women (over age 65) had less neck pain than younger women, which means that neck pain is not caused solely by aging.

(5) These findings are contrary to the 1996 retrospective questionnaire-based study from Lithuania published in The Lancet which found no chronic pain from whiplash as compared to the general population.