The burden of low back pain in Malta at a population level

Dr. Sarah Cuschieri[1], Prof. Neville Calleja[1,2], Ms. Vanessa Gorasso[3,4], Prof. Brecht Devleesschauwer[4,5]

[1]University of Malta
[2]Ministry of Health Malta
[3]Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium
[4]Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Sciensano, Brussels, Belgium
[5]Department of Veterinary Public Health and Food Safety, Ghent University, Merelbeke, Belgium

Background: Low back pain (LBP) is a leading global cause of all-age years lived with disability (YLD).

Setting: In Malta musculoskeletal complaints were reported to be the commonest consultations in primary care.

Aim: To estimate for the first time the burden of LBP at population level in Malta in terms of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and compare to estimates obtained by the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) study (2017).

OUTCOMES:
- LBP imposes a substantial burden in Malta, which is expected to increase with ageing population.
- Suggested that a multi-disciplinary targeted preventive and management approach is considered.
- Differences observed between local estimates and those of the GBD study suggest the integration of locally sourced data into the model in order to improve the DALYs estimates of each country.

Method: The Malta EHIS dataset was utilized for the LBP prevalence data. LBP was defined as self-reported history of chronic LBP for 12 months in combination to daily activities limitation. Proportions of LBP severity and their corresponding disability weights followed values reported in GBD study. YLDs for LBP were estimated for the whole population by sex. Since LBP does not carry any mortality, YLDs reflected DALYs. The estimated local DALYs per 100,000 were compared to the GBD study for Malta for the same year (2015).

Comparisons of low back pain disability-adjusted life years between the current Malta study to the GBD 2017 study by age-group for (A) Males; and (B) Females

A. Males

B. Females

Cuschieri S, Wyper GMA, Calleja N, Gorasso V, Devleesschauwer B. Measuring disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) due to low back pain in Malta. Archives of Public Health. 2020; 78:68