Prevalence and clinical features of epilepsy in Argentina. A community-based study.

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: To ascertain the prevalence of epilepsy in Junín, a town of 70,000-80,000 inhabitants from the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

BACKGROUND: Some South American communities have reported extremely high prevalences of epilepsy. We investigated whether Junín would also have a high prevalence.

DESIGN/METHODS: Systematic sampling was used to select 5,839 households (sampling fraction = 25%). Participating households amounted to 5,648 (97%), with 17,049 persons. A two-phase case-finding strategy was used. Phase 1 was the screening of the 17,049 persons, which was performed by trained but medically unsophisticated interviewers. Phase 2 was the neurological evaluation of the 250 persons who were screened positive for epilepsy. Diagnoses were based on defined diagnostic criteria.

RESULTS: As of January 1, 1991 (prevalence day), 106 persons had epilepsy, including 64 (60%) with active epilepsy. Among these, 9 (14%) were epilepsy cases newly diagnosed by survey neurologists, and 50 (78%) were on antiepileptic treatment at the time of the survey. Regarding the same 64 persons, seizures were generalized in 37 (58%) and partial in 24 (38%). Lifetime prevalence of epilepsy was 6.2/1,000 (6.3/1,000, age adjusted to the world standard population). Total point prevalence for active epilepsy was 3.8/1,000 (4.0 for females and 3.5 for males). In addition, prevalence peaked at the ages of 40-59 for females and 0-4 for males.

CONCLUSIONS: This is one of the first community-based studies of epilepsy in Argentina, and the prevalence results provide new epidemiological data contributing to our understanding of the different prevalence rates found in Latin America.