



REVIEW ARTICLE

Epidemiological research on the incidence and prevalence of hypertension in the Portuguese population: A scoping review[☆]



Mafalda Sousa Uva^{*}, Paulo Victorino, Rita Roquette, Ausenda Machado, Carlos Matias Dias

Departamento de Epidemiologia, Instituto Nacional Doutor Ricardo Jorge, Lisboa, Portugal

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KEYWORDS

Hypertension;
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Abstract

Introduction and Objectives: Portugal is among the countries with the highest levels of mean blood pressure. The aim of the present study is to conduct a structured literature review describing the scope (quantity, focus and nature) of published epidemiological research on the prevalence and incidence of hypertension in the Portuguese population.

Methods: The scoping review was conducted during June 2013, using two information sources, B-on and PubMed, to search for published studies on the prevalence and incidence of hypertension with data collected between 2005–2013 and 1995–2013, respectively.

Results: We identified 527 publications, of which 14 on the prevalence and two on the incidence of hypertension were selected. The results show more studies on populations in the North region of Portugal; an apparent lack of published studies specifically targeting the Alentejo and Algarve populations; long delays between data collection and publication of results (up to nine years); considerable variability in measurement methods; and infrequent data stratification by gender and age.

Conclusions: Differences in blood pressure measurement methods, not specified in most studies, the infrequency of stratification of results by gender and age, and the geographic asymmetry in coverage of the Portuguese population, hinder monitoring of the incidence and prevalence of hypertension in Portugal.

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^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mafalda.uva@insa.min-saude.pt (M.S. Uva).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Hipertensão arterial;
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Portugal

Investigação epidemiológica sobre prevalência e incidência de hipertensão arterial na população portuguesa – uma revisão de âmbito

Resumo

Introdução e objetivos: Portugal é referido na literatura como um dos países com maiores níveis de tensão arterial média na população. O objetivo do presente estudo é realizar uma revisão estruturada da literatura acerca do âmbito (quantidade, foco e natureza) da investigação epidemiológica publicada sobre prevalência e incidência de hipertensão arterial na população portuguesa.

Métodos: A revisão de âmbito foi realizada em junho de 2013. Através da consulta das fontes de informação Pubmed e B-on foram pesquisados estudos sobre prevalência e incidência de hipertensão arterial cuja recolha de dados tivesse decorrido, respetivamente, entre 2005-2013 e 1995-2013.

Resultados: Obtiveram-se 527 publicações, das quais foram selecionadas 14 sobre prevalência e duas sobre incidência de hipertensão. Os resultados indicam maior número de estudos sobre populações da região Norte do país; a aparente inexistência de estudos específicos sobre as populações do Alentejo e Algarve; longos períodos de tempo entre a recolha de dados e a publicação dos resultados (até nove anos); variabilidade apreciável nos métodos utilizados para medir a tensão arterial; e a infrequente desagregação dos resultados por sexo e idade.

Conclusões: Os diferentes métodos de medição da hipertensão arterial, omissos na maioria dos trabalhos analisados, a rara desagregação dos resultados por sexo e idade e a assimetria de cobertura geográfica da população dificultam a monitorização das tendências da frequência de hipertensão arterial em Portugal.

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Introduction

Hypertension is the most important risk factor for cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease, particularly myocardial infarction and stroke, which are major causes of morbidity and mortality throughout the world.¹⁻³ In 2008, the global prevalence of hypertension in adults aged ≥ 25 years was 40%, despite falling between 1980 and 2008.^{4,5}

For the last 30 years, Portugal has been among the countries with the highest levels of mean blood pressure (BP).^{6,7} In 2008, the prevalence of hypertension (or use of antihypertensive medication) in adults aged ≥ 25 years was estimated at 41.9% (46.5% in men and 37.4% in women).⁸ Between 1980 and 2008 mean systolic BP fell, particularly in women.⁸

Knowledge of the evolution, trends and current status of epidemiological measures of hypertension (incidence, prevalence and associated mortality) is important for planning, implementation and evaluation of public health measures.⁹

A recent systematic review by Pereira et al. concluded that between 1990 and 2005, the prevalence of hypertension (defined as systolic and/or diastolic BP $\geq 140/90$ mmHg) remained approximately constant in young adults and decreased in middle-aged and older adults, whereas the prevalence of self-reported hypertension increased by 0.4% per year in the same period.¹⁰

Systematic reviews have generally been the preferred method of literature review, but the growing volume and importance of health research has led to the development

of alternative forms of structured review, including scoping reviews, which are increasingly used in public health research.¹¹ Although these may appear simpler than a systematic review, scoping reviews retain a similar organization and transparency. They have been described as a technique to 'map' relevant literature on a particular subject in order to obtain an overall picture of current knowledge,^{11,12} and are mainly used to identify gaps in knowledge and/or to summarize the most important studies in a specific field.¹³ The main difference from systematic reviews is that the latter aim to provide an initial evaluation of the quality of studies and a quantitative and qualitative summary of results, while scoping reviews do not set out to evaluate the quality of studies, but to give a qualitative review of the scope, methods and results of existing research.¹⁴

So far as we know, no studies aimed at describing the scope and results in a particular area of health care research have been published in Portugal using the scoping review methodology. Such a review is of particular importance in relation to hypertension, given the prevalence of the disease and the need to identify any gaps in knowledge in order to define research priorities.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to perform a scoping review on the prevalence and incidence of hypertension in the Portuguese population describing the scope (quantity, focus and nature)^{14,15} of research and to summarize the main results.

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