



REVISTA DE
GASTROENTEROLOGÍA
DE MÉXICO

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The prevalence of irritable bowel symptoms in a population of shopping mall visitors in Santiago de Chile[☆]

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Received 31 January 2013; accepted 2 July 2013

Available online 5 March 2014

KEYWORDS

Irritable bowel
syndrome;
Prevalence;
General population;
Santiago;
Chile

Abstract

Background: Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a functional gastrointestinal disorder characterized by abdominal pain or discomfort that is associated with altered bowel habit. Both its prevalence and clinical characteristics vary throughout Latin America. A percentage of patients does not seek medical attention, therefore a reliable prevalence figure can only be established by interviewing non-selected populations.

Aims: To study the prevalence and clinical characteristics of IBS symptoms in non-selected subjects in Santiago, Chile.

Methods: A total of 437 shopping mall visitors above the age of 15 years (246 women) participated in the study by answering the Rome II validated questionnaire for IBS. The demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, comorbidities, and a family history of IBS were registered.

Results: A total of 64.1% subjects reported having gastrointestinal symptoms and 28.6% had symptoms suggestive of IBS. When the subjects with IBS symptoms were compared with the asymptomatic individuals, a predominance of women (65.6 vs 42.9, $p < 0.001$) and a greater cholecystectomy frequency (33.6 vs 12.9% $p < 0.05$) were observed in the former. The age of symptom onset was 30.4 years. An equal percentage of subjects (42.4%) presented with diarrhea and constipation and 15.2% presented with alternating IBS. Participants with a higher educational level reported a lower percentage of IBS ($p < 0.05$). A family history of the disease was present in 40% of the subjects with IBS, compared with 14.9% in the asymptomatic individuals ($p < 0.05$). Only 39.2% of the subjects had seen a physician for their symptoms and the treatment and tests ordered were inappropriate.

[☆] Please cite this article as: Madrid-Silva AM, et al. Prevalencia de síntomas de intestino irritable en población asistente a centros comerciales de Santiago de Chile. Revista de Gastroenterología de México. 2013;78:203–210.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Síndrome de intestino irritable;
Prevalencia;
Población general;
Santiago;
Chile

Conclusions: The prevalence of IBS symptoms in the population studied is one of the highest described. Therefore, health teams should have the necessary knowledge and skill required for its management.

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Prevalencia de síntomas de intestino irritable en población asistente a centros comerciales de Santiago de Chile

Resumen

Antecedentes: El síndrome de intestino irritable (SII) es un trastorno funcional digestivo caracterizado por dolor o malestar abdominal, asociado a alteraciones del hábito intestinal. Tanto prevalencia como características clínicas son variables en Latinoamérica. Un porcentaje de pacientes no consulta, la real prevalencia sólo puede establecerse encuestando población no seleccionada.

Objetivos: Estudiar la prevalencia y características clínicas de síntomas de SII en sujetos no seleccionados de Santiago, Chile.

Métodos: Participaron 437 mayores de 15 años (246 mujeres), asistentes a centros comerciales, quienes respondieron el cuestionario validado de Roma II para SII. Se registraron, antecedentes demográficos, socioeconómicos, comorbilidades y antecedentes familiares de SII.

Resultados: Un 64,1% relató síntomas digestivos, 28,6% síntomas sugerentes de SII. Comparando sujetos con síntomas de SII con asintomáticos se observó en los primeros: predominio del sexo femenino (65,6 vs. 42,9. $p < 0.001$) y mayor frecuencia de colecistectomía (33,6 vs. 12,9% $p < 0,05$). La edad de inicio de los síntomas fue 30,4 años. Se observó igual porcentaje (42,4%) entre pacientes con diarrea y con estreñimiento, y 15,2% alternante. Sujetos con mayor nivel educacional reportaron menor porcentaje de SII ($p < 0,05$). El antecedente familiar de SII estuvo presente en 40% de sujetos con SII, comparado con sujetos asintomáticos 14,9% ($p < 0,05$). Solo 39,2% consultaron al médico. El tratamiento y exámenes solicitados no estuvieron acorde con los síntomas.

Conclusión: La prevalencia de síntomas de SII en la población estudiada es una de las más altas descritas, por lo cual los equipos de salud debieran tener los conocimientos y destrezas adecuados para su manejo.

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Introduction

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is part of a subgroup of the so-called functional gastrointestinal disorders, characterized by abdominal pain and discomfort associated with changes in the bowel habit and bowel movement disorders. The Rome criteria have established definitions relative to both the characteristics and duration of these alterations.¹⁻³

Studies conducted on this group of patients have revealed different pathophysiologic disorders such as: visceral hyperalgesia,^{4,5} altered motility and bowel transit,^{2,6,7} changes in the microbiota,⁸ and others associated with disorders related to the psychosocial sphere.⁹

Its impact on the health of the population is important, given that it constitutes a high percentage of the gastroenterologic consultations in the United States and is a significant cause of absenteeism in the workplace.^{2,10} Its economic impact is great due to the requirements of a larger number of medical consultations, tests, and medicines, compared with the population that does not present with IBS.¹¹⁻¹³

This pathology has a precocious onset and it is estimated to affect from 10 to 15% of schoolchildren, half of whom continue to present with symptoms into adulthood.¹⁴

Its prevalence is variable depending on the communities studied and in several Latin American countries it varies between 9 and 18%;¹⁵ whether these variations are real, or are the result of studies on different population groups, or depend on surveys using different instruments, or on the existence or not of confirmation after diagnosis, is the subject of debate. Today well-structured surveys are available that make an important approach to diagnosis possible, while at the same time reducing the presence of organic pathology.

It is believed that the majority of patients with IBS do not seek medical attention for their symptoms,¹³ and therefore the only way to establish the true prevalence in a population is to survey an important number of individuals from a non-selected population. In this regard, no previous studies with these characteristics have been carried out.

Our aim was to study the prevalence of symptoms consistent with IBS in a non-selected population in Santiago de Chile, using the Rome II questionnaire for IBS to conduct the survey.

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