

PREVALENCE OF URINARY INCONTINENCE IN A BRAZILIAN RURAL POPULATION

Hypothesis / aims of study

Urine loss is a social, hygienic and economic problem that has a great impact in quality of life. There are many epidemiologic studies showing a great variation in the urinary incontinence prevalence (12 to 53%). These variations lead to different populations and different definitions. There are very few epidemiologic studies realized in a Brazilian population. In terms of public health it is an important problem mainly in geriatric population.

Our aim is study the prevalence of urinary incontinence in a particularly population, strictly rural with poor life conditions.

Study design, materials and methods

All the women older than 35 years were interviewed in two districts (Minas Gerais state). As a part of a family health program, medical students attended this population, so they were trained to apply a prevalence questionnaire with 35 questions which included: age, race, weight, gynecologic and obstetric history, chronic diseases, urinary problems, medications, habits, socioeconomic status. Between June 2003 and February 2004, 1210 women (all the women older than 35 years) were interviewed by trained medical students. **The urinary incontinence defined in this paper was leak of urine in the last 4 weeks.** The population is strictly rural, the 2 districts have a population of 3000 together, they have only a primary care small center which is 3 to 20 Km far from their houses. Their access to secondary or tertiary centers is very difficult. The majority of the population works in a small rural properties and produces only for subsistence. They have medical and paramedical care through family health program that brings doctors and paramedical people to visit them door-to-door.

Results

The mean age was 55,48 years-old (27-95). The economic status is a medium monthly family salary of 86 to 429 dollars. The reproductive status is 42,4% in menacme and 57,6% postmenopausal women. The urinary incontinence prevalence is 31,2% (377/1210); 25% (92) has pure stress incontinence, 17,7% (65) pure urge incontinence and 57,2% (210) has mixed complains. Dividing the population in two groups: with incontinence and without incontinence the nuliparity indices are 13% and 17,3% respectively. The mean parity was 6 (0-14) with 60% of domiciliary deliveries, which showed similar frequency in the two groups (58% among the incontinent and 51% among continent). In the incontinent group 52% (196) answered that the problem has a moderate to intense impact in their lives even though 60% answered that have no bother with the problem. 292 (78%) women did not seek for medical help and the reasons were: lack of access, embarrassment or to find that this is normal in an advanced

Interpretation of results

This study showed urinary incontinence prevalence of 31,2% among a population with a high parity (mean 6) and poor obstetric assistance (60% of home deliveries with no health professional assistance). It has been expected that in this kind of population would have a much higher prevalence of urinary incontinence. The rates are quite similar when compared with other studies (the same definition of leak of urine in the last 4 weeks) realized in developed countries¹. Interestingly although 52% answered that have a moderate to intense impact in their lives, 60% considered that have no bother with the problem). Another possible reason for this findings could be the fact that this population has a so rudimentary condition of life that urinary incontinence for them is not really a problem comparing with other serious problems.

Concluding message

Classically it is known that poor obstetric assistance increases the prevalence of urinary incontinence. In this particular population the urinary incontinence was similar from other countries. There are two reasonable reasons for that:

- The complaint of leak of urine is decreased when there are other priorities in a population who live in a hard condition.
- Obstetric assistance is not the main factor for the development of urinary incontinence.

More studies, mainly comparative should be done to elucidate this matter.