The Impact of Migraine on Health Status

Marie-Louise Essink-Bot, MD; Leona van Royen, MSc; Paul Krabbe, MSc; Gouke J. Bonsel, MD, PhD; Frans FH Rutten, PhD

Problems.—What is the effect of migraine on health status, defined as the patient’s physical, psychological, and social functioning? And, suppose that the health status of migraine sufferers appears to be impaired, to what extent is this a consequence of migraine-associated comorbidity rather than of migraine itself?

Methods.—A group of 846 migraineurs, selected from the general population following IHS criteria, and a control group were surveyed with the Medical Outcomes Study 36-item Short-Form Health Survey, Nottingham Health Profile, EuroQol instrument, and the COOP/WONCA charts. Questions on demographic characteristics and comorbidity were included.

Results.—The health status of migraineurs appeared to be significantly impaired in comparison to the control group. Because statistical significance is distinct from relevance, effect size estimators were employed. Although the direction of the differences indicated consistently a worse health status of the migraineurs, regardless of the instrument used, the sizes of the differences were small to medium. Self-reported comorbidity, especially depression, was more prevalent in the migraine group. However, this offered only a partial explanation for the impaired health status of the migraine group.

Conclusions.—Migraine has an independent moderately deteriorating effect on the daily functioning of individuals.

Key words: migraine, health status, comorbidity, SF-36, Nottingham Health Profile, EuroQol COOP/WONCA charts

Abbreviations: IHS International Headache Society, SF-36 Medical Outcomes Study 36-item Short-Form Health Survey, MOS-20 Medical Outcomes Study 20-item instrument, NHP Nottingham Health Profile, GHQ General Health Questionnaire, COOP/WONCA charts Dartmouth COOP Functional Health Assessment Charts/WONCA, MCA Multiple Classification Analysis

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Health status, the focus of the present paper, is defined as physical, psychological, and social functioning. Osterhaus and Townsend concluded from a survey of 845 migraineurs (meeting IHS criteria) using the Medical Outcomes Study 36-item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36) that “although migraineurs may be physically able to function, they function behaviorally at a level well below their physical capabilities, and for some domains even worse than patients suffering from arthritis, gastrointestinal disorders or diabetes.” Solomon et al assessed the health status of 208 patients attending a headache center with the Medical Outcomes Study 20-item instrument (MOS-20). The authors conclude “that chronic headache disorders are associated with significant limitations in all measured dimensions of patient well-being and functioning when compared to patients with no chronic condition; and that patients with chronic headaches have a level of function worse than that of patients suffering from diabetes, arthritis, depression, and