

Prevalence of diabetes across different immigrant groups in North-eastern Italy

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BACKGROUND AND AIMS: Type 2 diabetes, one of the most important non-communicable diseases, represents a major health problem worldwide. Immigrants may contribute relevantly to the increase in diabetes. The aim of the study was to investigate variability in diabetes prevalence across different immigrant groups in the Veneto Region (northeastern Italy).

METHODS AND RESULTS: Diabetic subjects on January 2013 were identified by record linkage of hospital discharge records, drug prescriptions, and exemptions from medical charges for diabetes. Immigrant groups were identified based on citizenship. Age-standardized prevalence rates were obtained for residents aged 20-59 years by the direct method, taking the whole regional population as reference. Prevalence rate ratios (RR) with 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) were computed with respect to Italian citizens. Among residents aged 20-59 years, 45280 Italian and 7782 foreign subjects affected by diabetes were identified. Prevalence rates were highest among immigrants from South-East Asia, RR 4.9 (CI 4.7-5.1) among males, and 7.6 (7.2-8.1) among females, followed by residents from both North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Citizens from Eastern Europe (the largest immigrant group) showed rates similar to Italians. Most South-Asian patients aged 20-39 years were not insulin-treated, suggesting a very high risk of early onset type 2 diabetes in this ethnic group.

CONCLUSION: Large variations in diabetes prevalence by ethnicity should prompt tailored strategies for primary prevention, diabetes screening, and disease control. An increased demand for prevention and health care in selected population groups should guide appropriate resource allocation.

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