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Immigrants in Italy and tension-type headache: correlated personality traits

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The notable occurrence of diagnosed tension-type headache (TTH) [1] among immigrants sent to our Headache Centre at the Policlinico Umberto I in Rome led us to undertake an initial study that explores the underlying personality traits that might contribute to this phenomenon.

We examined 50 patients between the ages of 20 and 55 years old. The sample was comprised of the following ethnic groups: 31 from Eastern Europe, 9 from Central America and 10 from China. Each individual had been in Rome for at least 18 months and had been diagnosed with either chronic or episodic TTH.

The instruments used to gather data were: clinical conversation, MMPI1 test, SCID2, Machover human figure drawing test and Kock's Tree test.

Thirty-one patients out of the total sample of 50 demonstrated high values to the neurotic triads ($65 < H_s < 80$; $65 < D < 81$; $65 < H_y < 81$), which confirms the existence of somatoform disorders as well as depressive and hysterical symptoms. Nineteen of the 31 subjects suffered from chronic TTH, while 12 suffered from episodic TTH. Of 19 patients with normal values of the neurotic triad, 4 suffered from chronic TTH and the remaining 15 from episodic TTH.

Our data indicate a possible correlation between high values of the neurotic triad and the presence of chronic TTH. The number of subjects with this combination is considerably greater than those with normal values of neurotic triad and chronic TTH. Our data indicated no significant information concerning episodic TTH. In conclusion, we plan to undertake future studies to further explore significant relationships in patients who have high values of the neurotic triad, for example:

- the prevalence of somatoform disorders [2] as well as depressive and hysterical traits among different ethnic groups; and
- the prevalence of somatoform disorders as well as depressive and hysterical traits in both episodic and chronic TTH.

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