

CHARACTERISTIC OF PATIENTS ATTENDING TERTIARY HEADACHE CENTRES IN LIGURIA: A CROSS-SECTIONAL OBSERVATIONAL STUDY

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Background. The aim of this study was to characterize the demographic characteristics, healthcare access, referral pathways, and healthcare utilization of patients attending tertiary headache centres in Liguria

Methods. This cross-sectional observational study included patients attending nine tertiary headache centres in the Liguria region. No exclusion criteria were applied. All patients attending first visit completed a standardized questionnaire assessing demographic characteristics, healthcare access, referral pathways, and healthcare utilization.

Results. A total of 244 patients were included from May to July 2025. The headache centre with the highest number of patients was the University Neurology Department of the IRCCS Azienda Ospedaliera Metropolitana (n=73, 30% of the total sample).Among all patients, 191 (78%) were female. The mean age was 39.7 years (SD 17.1). Most patients had completed either upper secondary education (123, 51%) or university education (59, 24%).The most common referral source was the general practitioner (128, 53%), followed by other medical specialists (67, 28%), self-referral (25, 10%), the emergency department (16, 7%), other sources (10, 4%), pharmacists (5, 2%), and other healthcare professionals (2, 1%).The most frequent diagnosis was migraine alone (170, 70%), followed by tension-type headache (TTH) alone (19, 8%), while 27 patients (11%) had both migraine and TTH. Four patients (1.5%) were diagnosed with secondary headache disorders.Among patients diagnosed with migraine, 117 (59%) had low-frequency episodic migraine, 51 (26%) had high-frequency episodic migraine, and 30 (15%) had chronic migraine. A total of 42 patients (22%) also experienced aura. Among patients diagnosed with TTH, 33 (72%) had episodic TTH and 13 (28%) had chronic TTH.Overall, 49 patients (20%) had previously attended another headache centre. In addition, 64 patients (26%) had previously consulted healthcare professionals outside a headache centre. Ninety-two patients (39%) had previously attended an emergency department for headache. A total of 148 patients (64%) had previously undergone at least one diagnostic investigation.

Conclusions. Most patients attending tertiary headache centres in Liguria had migraine and were referred by general practitioners. Despite the majority of patients were diagnosed with low-frequency episodic migraine, previous healthcare utilization was common, particularly emergency department attendances and diagnostic investigations.