PREVALENCE OF DEMENTIA IS NOT ASSOCIATED WITH EDUCATION IN A BULGARIAN POPULATION

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Introduction: Low education is a commonly cited risk factor for dementia. Its role has been confirmed in numerous studies. Some investigators, however, have reported only partial association between education and dementia, or no association at all. No studies on this topic have been performed in Bulgaria.

Aims: To assess whether prevalence of dementia varies among subgroups of Bulgarian citizens with different education degrees.

Methods: Questions on the level of education, according to the national educational standards, were included in the screening interview of a two-phase prevalence study of cognitive disturbances in Varna, Bulgaria. The study sample consisted of 605 randomly selected subjects over the age of 65 years. We assessed the relationship between education and dementia, diagnosed according to DSM-IV criteria.

Results: Five hundred and forty subjects (89%) completed the screening phase of the study, while 65 (11%) were non-responders. Fifteen participants (2.8%) had initial level of education (< 8 years), 151 (28.0%) had primary (8 years), 249 (46.1%) had secondary education (11-12 years), 41 (7.6%) had a college degree, while university degree was reported by 84 subjects (15.6%). Dementia was diagnosed in 65 subjects (7.2%). Logistic regression analysis showed no statistically significant relationship between the diagnosis and the level of education (p=0.89).

Conclusions: Our results do not conform to the common conception stating that dementia prevalence is inversely related to the level of education. A larger study with a more uniform distribution of subjects according to education may be required in order to confirm these findings.