

Ethnic Distribution of Self-Reported Chronic Diseases among the Elderly in Taiwan

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Abstract

Chronic diseases are important risk factors in predicting subsequent disabilities. By identifying risk factors of disabilities, intervention strategies in slowing or delaying disabilities can be developed. Data from two waves of a longitudinal survey (N=2480) were analyzed to see if there are disparities in the prevalence and incidence of self-reported chronic diseases. Stratified analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between chronic diseases and ethnicity. All associations were examined at each of the combination strata of age, gender, and education levels. Both the prevalence and cumulative incidence were examined and the Mantel-Haenszel Test was used to determine the associations between diseases and ethnicity in each strata. Results show that, regardless of ethnicity, hypertension, heart problem, back pain and arthritis were some of the most prevalent chronic conditions among the elderly. In terms of the ethnic distribution of these chronic conditions, it appears that Mainlander elders were more afflicted than their Taiwanese counterparts. This study concludes that the lower prevalence of self-reported chronic diseases among Taiwanese may be, in part, due to an underreporting of health problems measured by the survey questionnaire. Public health professionals should be aware that different illness perceptions and inequalities in the health delivery system might exist across ethnicity.

Key Words: elderly, prevalence, ethnicity, chronic diseases, Taiwan