

Characterization of mental health in cluster headache a.k.a suicide headache

3. Epidemiology and surveillance

Clémence Deborgies Sanches¹, *Amirhossein Taymouri*¹, *Gabriella Smedfors*¹, *Anna Steinberg*^{2, 3}, *Christina Sjöstrand*^{2, 4}, *Elisabet Waldenlind*^{2, 3}, *Caroline Ran*¹, *Andrea Carmine Belin*¹

¹ Centre for Cluster Headache, Department of Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet, 171 77 Stockholm, Sweden

² Department of Clinical Neuroscience, Karolinska Institutet, 171 77 Stockholm, Sweden

³ Department of Neurology, Karolinska University Hospital, 171 76 Stockholm, Sweden

⁴ Department of Neurology, Danderyd Hospital, 182 88 Stockholm, Sweden

Abstract text

Cluster headache is a primary headache disorder characterized by excruciating recurrent headaches that start suddenly with unilateral trigeminal distribution. The pain is accompanied by ipsilateral autonomic symptoms e.g. rhinorrhea. Cluster headache affects ~0.1% of the population world-wide and between 5,000-10,000 individuals in Sweden suffer from cluster headache today. The attack duration ranges from 15 minutes up to three hours and the frequency can vary from once every 2 days to eight attacks every 24 hours. The disease appears in active bouts with daily attacks, interspersed by symptom free remission periods and it's classified in two subtypes; the more common episodic form (85%), experiencing remission periods of more than three months/year and the chronic form (15%) with short and/or few remission periods. No cure exists and the disease is sometimes referred to as suicide headache due to suicide attempts when treatment is insufficient. We therefore wanted to investigate and characterize mental health in cluster headache and in relation to sex and subtype. An anonymized web-based questionnaire was sent to 500 Swedish cluster headache patients. More than 50% reported suicidal ideation which can be compared to ~9% in the general population. In addition, more than 50% reported self-harm behavior during cluster headache attacks compared to ~5-17% in the general population. Most commonly individuals with cluster headache report that they hit themselves or their head against something during a headache attack, biting and pulling out hair were also common. These results show a strong inclination of individuals with cluster headache to resort to self-harm. Further analysis will show if these behaviors are connected to the excruciating pain experienced during a cluster headache attack or if there is also an impact on mental health in general in this patient group, which should be considered by the health care profession.