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Epidemiology of migraine, tension-type headache, and other headaches in a Brazilian cohort

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Introduction
Migraine and tension-type headache (TTH) are the most common primary headache disorders and constitute a major public health burden worldwide. Although TTH is frequently reported as the most prevalent subtype, population-based data consistently show that migraine accounts for the greatest, particularly due to its higher pain intensity and tendency toward chronification.

Objective
To evaluate the prevalence, pain intensity, and attack frequency of migraine and TTH in a prospective birth cohort followed into adulthood.

Methods
This population-based study analyzed data from a longitudinal birth cohort comprising 2,474 participants. Diagnoses were established according to the International Classification of Headache Disorders, 3rd edition (ICHD-3) criteria. Outcomes included the prevalence of headache subtypes, sociodemographic characteristics, mean pain intensity assessed via the Visual Analog Scale (VAS, 0–10), and headache frequency (days per month).

Results
The overall prevalence of any headache was 66.8%. Migraine was the most common primary headache disorder, affecting 47.5% (n=1,173) of the cohort, compared with TTH in 14.1% (n=349) and other headaches in 5.1% (n=127). The migraine group had a mean age of 32.3 (SD=7.5) years and exhibited a marked female predominance (70.9%), contrasting with the TTH (40.1% female; mean age 31.4, SD=7.7) and headache-free (33.8% female; mean age 33.7, SD=6.9) groups. Furthermore, a first-degree family history of headache was reported by 49.7% of migraineurs. Regarding clinical presentation, throbbing pain was the predominant feature in migraine (67.6%), whereas pressure-like pain was most frequent in TTH (43.3%). Mean VAS pain intensity was 6.2 (SD=2.9), substantially higher than for TTH (3.7, SD=1.8) and other headaches (4.2, SD=2.2). Chronic migraine (≥15 headache days/month) was present in 18.5% of migraineurs—comprising 11.4% with >14 headache days but not daily, and 7.1% with daily headaches. Among TTH sufferers, 7.7% met criteria for chronic TTH (3.7% and 4.0%, respectively).

Conclusion
In this large prospective cohort, migraine was the most prevalent primary headache disorder. The strong female predominance, elevated chronification rate, and higher pain intensity among migraineurs, compared with TTH, reinforce the disproportionate burden of this condition and support the need for targeted public health strategies.

Keywords:
Migraine disorders
Epidemiology
Tension-type headache

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