



Headache and Covid-19: an Analysis of Research Trends in Search Engines Over the Last Six Years

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Introduction

Headache is a frequent symptom in the Brazilian public healthcare system, and it can manifest in various ways, either as an autonomous condition (primary headaches) or as a symptom of another illness (secondary headaches). It is relevant to note that COVID-19, an infectious disease discovered in December 2019, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, can trigger this symptom in its secondary form. With that said, it is crucial to consider that social media plays a significant role in shaping the behavior of the population today, serving as a critical means to disseminate health-related information. It is noteworthy that one way to monitor potential uncertainties among the population about a specific topic is through technological tools like Google Trends. The use of this platform can reveal the concerns and questions of the population regarding certain health topics, through searches conducted on the Google search engine, which is the largest global search platform.

Objective

To analyze searches for terms related to headache on Google Trends, three years before and three years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, conducted in English and Portuguese.

Methods

A search was conducted on the Google Trends platform using the terms "headache" and "cefaleia," which means headache in Portuguese, from January 2017 to December 2022. Statistical analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS program to compare the search intent for each year.

Results

Comparing the pre-pandemic years (2017, 2018 and 2019) to the post-pandemic years (2020, 2021, and 2022) for the term "headache," there was an increase of 20.87% in search intent. For the term "cefaleia," there was an increase of 40.72%. There was a continuous increase in search intent for both the term "cefaleia" and the term "headache" over the years, with only one episode of decline (-4.69%) between 2020 and 2021 for the term "headache." The largest increase in search intent (26.40%) occurred between 2021 and 2022 for the term "cefaleia".

Conclusion

In summary, this analysis of research trends related to headache on Google Trends over the past six years (2017 to 2022) revealed a significant increase in search intent, both for the term "headache" in English and the term "cefaleia" in Portuguese. This increase was even more pronounced in the years following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating a clear association between the pandemic and the population's interest in headache-related information. The role of social media and the internet as sources of health information dissemination is undeniable, and Google Trends has proven to be a valuable tool for monitoring public concerns. These results emphasize the importance of providing accurate and accessible information about the relationship between COVID-19 and headache, as well as the need to address the population's health concerns adequately during crisis situations like the pandemic.

Keywords: Headache; COVID-19; Google Trends.