

Symptoms in the general population – determinants for healthcare seeking

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Background: It is now widely recognised that the experience of symptoms is common but often ignored or cared for in a private setting by the individual. Only few cases are presented to the general practitioner (GP), a phenomenon known as the 'the symptom iceberg'. A recent British study of 1000 adults illustrated that 9 out of 10 adults had experienced some sort of symptom or ailment within the last two weeks.

The decision to consult a GP results from a complex mix of physical, psychological and social factors. Knowledge of these factors and other factors regarding interpretation and handling of symptom experiences is imperfect.

Aim

A perspective on healthcare seeking and symptoms, including an analysis of symptom characteristics, personal characteristics, socioeconomic status, self-rated health and network as possible determinants for healthcare seeking.

Methods

The study was designed as a nationwide cohort study (DaSC) of 100 000 people randomly selected in the general population and with baseline data based on a web-based survey. Of the 95 568 (95.6%) eligible subjects, 49 706 subjects completed the questionnaire, yielding an overall response rate of 52.2%. The data collection was conducted from June to December 2012. All Danish citizens are registered in the Danish Civil Registration System (CRS) with a unique personal identification number enabling accurate linkage between national registers.

Project status

The three-year PhD period started at the beginning of March 2013 and is expected to be completed at the beginning of April 2017. Throughout this period, the ambition is to complete three articles in which the first article, Self-reported symptoms and health care seeking in the general population - exploring "The Symptom Iceberg" (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26195232>), is already published in BMC Public Health. The second article is recently submitted to the British Journal of General Practice and is awaiting review comments. The last and third article about the network's influence on healthcare seeking is in the preliminary analysis phase.