

The prevalence of low back pain in Africa: a systematic review update

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Background: Low back pain (LBP) remains a common health problem and one of the most prevalent musculoskeletal conditions globally. A systematic review in 2007 found that the prevalence of LBP among African populations was comparable to that of developed nations and rising. A number of studies into the prevalence of LBP in Africa have since emerged, warranting an update of the literature.

Methods: An updated search of all accessible bibliographic databases via the Stellenbosch University's Medical and Health Sciences Library website was conducted between April 2014 and October 2014. All English and French population-based studies into the prevalence of LBP among children, adolescents and adults living in Africa, published during and after January 2006 were included. A meta-analysis of the data was conducted using Microsoft (MS) Excel, and forest plots to illustrate summary estimates were generated.

Results: A total of 47 studies were included in this review update (22 new studies). The

majority of the studies were conducted in Nigeria (n=19;40.4%) and South Africa (14;29.8%). Fourteen of the 53 African countries are represented in this review. The combined sample size was 45 828. The combined age range for the included studies was 10 to 94 years. The cumulative lifetime, one-year and point prevalence of LBP in Africa was 41.7 (95% CI 29.4;53.7); 54.9 (95% CI 48.8;61.2) and 31.5 (95% CI 19.8,43.2), respectively.

Conclusion: This review update found that the cumulative one-year and point prevalence of LBP among African nations, was higher than the global prevalence reported. Caution has to however be taken when interpreting the summary estimates provided, since high heterogeneity was displayed among included studies. Due to the poor methodological quality found among many of the included studies, it is recommended that future studies prioritize conducting methodologically sound studies and report essential information.