

# Epidemiological Study on Restless Legs Syndrome in the Polish Population

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**Objectives:** To evaluate the frequency, clinical characteristics and effectiveness of diagnosis of restless legs syndrome (RLS) in a Polish population.

**Background:** RLS is a very common sensorimotor disorder, however it is usually not properly diagnosed and treated. The diagnosis of RLS is based on clinical symptoms (diagnostic criteria defined by International RLS Study Group – IRLSSG) and its severity can be assessed with the IRLSSG Rating Scale (IRLSSGRS).

**Methods:** The study was conducted in Mielno, a small town on the Baltic seaside of Poland, with a population of 5100. A questionnaire consisting of four questions based on the IRLSSG diagnostic criteria was sent to all adult patients of the local primary care center. Patients who completed the questionnaire and positively answered the four questions were invited for a verification visit. During this visit the diagnosis of RLS was confirmed following an examination performed by a neurologist. A more detailed questionnaire concerning the history and symptoms of RLS, IRLSSG-RS, SF-36, Beck's depression scale and sleepiness scale were also completed.

**Results:** The screening questionnaire was sent to 4581 adult patients and 1161 (23.9%) responded. Four hundred and seventeen (417, 35.9%) of them positively answered all four diagnostic questions and were invited for a neurological evaluation. Following the examination of 234 individuals, RLS was finally diagnosed in 88 subjects. Surprisingly, there was a high rate of false positive diagnosis (according to

the 4-question questionnaire, n=146, 62.4%) was reported after detailed neurological examination.

The prevalence of RLS, adjusted for the demographic structure of the whole studied population, was 8.1%. It was higher for males (11.4%) than for females (6.0%). The average age of onset was 45.5 years and the mean duration of complaints was 8.7 years. The mean IRLSSG-RS score was 20.8 points. Forty-four patients (50% of the RLS diagnosed population) experienced RLS symptoms at least twice weekly and reported them to be moderately or severely distressing. Everyday complaints were diagnosed in 4.46% of patients. These groups of patients required daily therapy. Only 25.3% of RLS sufferers complained to their primary care doctor about RLS symptoms and none of them received the proper diagnosis.

**Conclusions:** RLS is a common disorder in the Polish population and every second patient should obtain daily treatment. The disease is not diagnosed by primary care physicians. Diagnostic criteria (4 questions) should be cautiously used in clinical practice due to relatively high rate of false positive diagnoses.