

The epidemiology of chronic fatigue in the Swedish Twin Registry

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Objective: Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) remains an idiopathic and controversial entity. The impact of society is unclear. We here wanted to estimate the prevalence using a nation-wide register.

Methods: We screened 31.405 individual members of the Swedish Twin Registry for the symptoms of fatiguing illness via a telephone questionnaire. We refined self-reported symptoms via data from several national registries and from physician reviews of all available medical records in order to approximate closely the dominant case definition of CFS.

Results: The six month prevalence of CFS-like illness was 2.6% (95 CI 2.19-2.53) and was markedly higher in women than men, odds ration 3.92 (95% CI.24-4.72) with no significant association with age or years of education. There was a highly significant association with occupation that disappeared after accounting for gender.

Discussion and Conclusion: CFS-like illness may be more common than previously acknowledged. There is a marked increase in risk by gender. Previous reports that CFS is more prevalent in individuals in certain occupational categories were not confirmed and may have been due to confounding by gender.