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Comment

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Spinal Cord Injury Worldwide

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The present report of van den Berg et al. [1] focuses on the incidence pattern of spinal cord injuries, as evaluated by a systematic review of 13 papers originating from several different countries from an initial sample of 2,090 citations. From these citations, 85 publications potentially met the inclusion criteria that were initially defined. Only 13 publications were finally accepted. This is a rather small amount of accepted publications following a systematic review. Either the low number of accepted reports was caused by very specific inclusion criteria or the excluded reports were defined with suboptimal information. A conclusion that can be drawn from this research, in congruence with other systematic reviews, is the need for improved guidelines when publishing epidemiological results. This is of particular importance when defining inclusion and exclusion criteria. Based on the study's finding of a significant difference in incidence rates between the countries, it is quite possible that we can foresee an even higher incidence rate worldwide within the next decades due to several reasons. We know that with increasing age, the number of

falls among the elderly population will increase. Also, with increasing social welfare in both developing and emerging areas, the number of traumatic injuries will also increase.

Since the etiological factors of spinal cord injuries have become better understood, it has been easier to prevent these injuries. Within the framework of the World Health Organization, many effective initiatives regarding community-based prevention programs have been initiated. The implementation of injury control and safety promotion programs may significantly reduce the number of spinal cord injuries, not only in developing and emerging countries but also in the industrialized world.

Thus, incidence rates and systematic reviews, such as the paper under discussion, are of significant importance since they reflect what can be done within the framework of primary prevention. The incidence rates differ markedly between countries, which is not so easy to explain. However, since the vast majority of publications are retrospective analyses, these will probably start to level out when planning for simultaneous prospective studies in different countries with the same guidelines.

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