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Epilepsy in poor regions of the world

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Summary

Epilepsy is a common disorder, particularly in poor areas of the world, and can have a devastating effect on people with the disorder and their families. The burden of epilepsy in low-income countries is more than twice that found in high-income countries, probably because the incidence of risk factors is higher. Many of these risk factors can be prevented with inexpensive interventions, but there are only a few studies that have assessed the effect of reducing risk factors on the burden of epilepsy. The mortality associated with epilepsy in low-income countries is substantially higher than in less impoverished countries and most deaths seem to be related to untreated epilepsy (eg, as a result of falls or status epilepticus), but the risk factors for death have not been adequately examined. Epilepsy is associated with substantial stigma in low-income countries, which acts as a barrier to patients accessing biomedical treatment and becoming integrated within society. Seizures can be controlled by inexpensive antiepileptic drugs, but the supply and quality of these drugs can be erratic in poor areas. The treatment gap for epilepsy is high (>60%) in deprived areas, but this could be reduced with low-cost interventions. The substantial burden of epilepsy in poor regions of the world can be reduced by preventing the risk factors, reducing stigma, improving access to biomedical diagnosis and treatment, and ensuring that there is a continuous supply of good quality antiepileptic drugs.

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