

INTRODUCTION

Self-management, written asthma action plans, and regular medical review, have been shown to be effective in improving health outcomes and reducing hospital admissions for people with asthma. This study examined the prevalence of asthma, how people with asthma perceived the severity of their condition, and how perceptions of severity were associated with symptoms and management.

METHODS

The North West Adelaide Health Study examined the prevalence of asthma using a representative population sample of adults living in the North Western region of Adelaide. All households in the north western region with a telephone connected and the telephone listed in the Electronic White Pages were eligible for selection. Within each household, the person who had their birthday last and was aged 18 years or older, was selected for interview and invited to attend the clinic. Of those who were interviewed, the clinic participation rate was 69%.

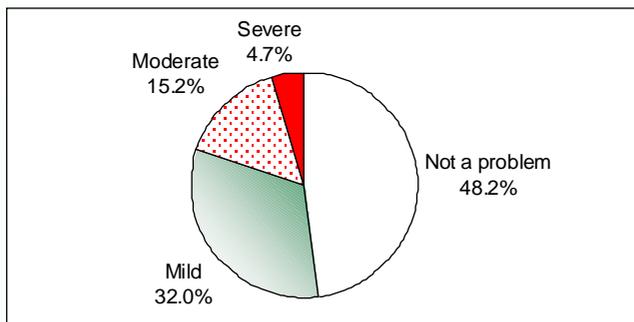
People with current asthma were defined as those who reported having been told by a doctor that they have asthma, or those who had a 15% increase in FEV₁ from pre-Ventolin to post-Ventolin, or if they had a 12% increase in FEV₁ with an absolute difference greater than 200mL.

A follow-up telephone interview in 2002 included questions on perception of severity, being woken from sleep from asthma, being admitted to hospital because of asthma, days lost from work, school, home duties or usual activities from asthma, ownership of a written asthma management plan, the number of general practitioners (GPs) seen for asthma in the past year, and oral steroid medication. Of those who attended the clinic, 88% took part in the follow-up interview.

RESULTS

The time of the follow-up interview, the overall prevalence of asthma, as determined from self-reported questionnaire data and biomedical measurement was 11.6%.

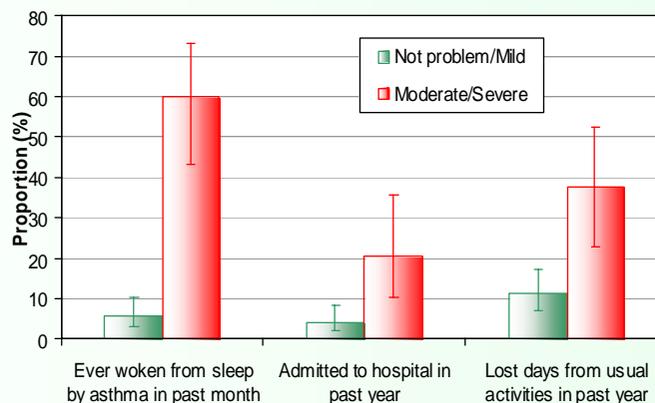
Figure 1: Perceived severity of asthma in the last month (n=219)



Of these people with asthma, 83% (n=241) were diagnosed, and 17% (n=50) were previously undiagnosed. Of respondents with diagnosed asthma, 91% (n=219) responded to the questions related to asthma symptoms and management.

The perception of severity of asthma in the last month is shown in Figure 1. Almost half of the people with asthma did not perceive their condition to be a problem. The mean percent predicted FEV₁, both pre- and post-Ventolin, decreased as perceived severity of asthma increased.

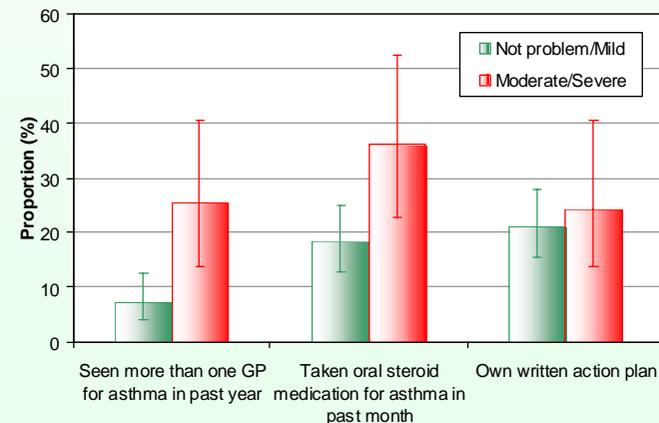
Figure 2: Waking from sleep, hospital admission, and days lost, by perception of asthma severity



People who considered their asthma to be moderate or severe were statistically significantly more likely to have been woken from sleep by their asthma in the past month, admitted to hospital in the past year, and to have lost days from usual activities, including work, home duties and study in the past year (Figure 2). Of those who had been admitted to hospital in the last year, 44% considered their asthma to be mild or not a problem.

They were also significantly more likely to have seen more than one GP for their asthma in the past year, and taken steroid medication in the past month (Figure 3). People who perceived their asthma to be moderate or severe were no more likely than people who considered their condition to be mild or not a problem to own a written asthma management plan.

Figure 3: GP attendance, oral steroid medication, and action plan ownership, by perception of asthma severity



CONCLUSIONS

This study highlighted that early detection and diagnosis should remain priorities for asthma. People admitted to hospital do not necessarily consider their asthma to be severe. People with asthma, particularly those who consider their condition to be moderate or severe, are not receiving continuity of care, and do not own written action management plans, which are both important for improving health outcomes and reducing hospital admission for people with asthma.

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