

PREVENTION AND CONTROL OF NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

ACCESSIBILITY OF HEALTH CARE AMONG PATIENTS WITH NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS IN THE PELAGONIA REGION, NORTH MACEDONIA

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Background: Public health issue at global level is to improve access to health care with intention of achieving equality and equity. Patients with non-communicable diseases face multiple barriers in health care including barriers in accessibility of health care (distance to health facilities, waiting lists, etc.).

Aim: The aim was to perceive the accessibility of health care in terms of geographical distance from home, among patients with non-communicable diseases in urban and rural areas in the Pelagonia region, North Macedonia. **Material and methods** This was a cross-sectional study conducted in the period June-September 2023. A questionnaire derived from existing literature was used for completing the purposes of the study. Patients with heart attack, stroke, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and/or diabetes mellitus were included.

Results: About 118 patients were included in the study, 57.63% from rural and 42.37% from urban areas. Patients living in rural areas face insufficient access to various health services more common compared to those from urban areas: pharmacies - 4.39 times OR=4,39 [95% CI (1,71-11,29)]; general practitioners - 3.08 times OR=3,08 [95% CI (1,28-7,43)]; public hospital health services - 24 times OR=24.0 [95% CI (8.64-66.68)], public health services of specialist doctors - 34.2 times OR=34.20 [95% CI (11.44-102,21)]. Distance as a problem for an examination by a specialist doctor was 5.76 times more common in rural areas OR=5,76 [95% CI (2,39-13,89)].

Conclusion: It is essential to conduct a national study that would determine the differences by region and place of residence (rural/ urban) in terms of accessibility to health care. The results would contribute in creation health policies in order to achieve equity in health care.

Keywords: accessibility, health care, non-communicable diseases