

**SPECIAL PAPER**

**Stroke in Southern Europe: A systematic review of the literature**

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Stroke is a leading cause of death and acquired disability worldwide. In Europe, strokes account for almost 1.1 million death per year. In particular, countries in Southern Europe constitute populations with a different lifestyle and dietary habits from those in Northern Europe and that may influence stroke incidence, type and risk factors.

**Aim:** The objective of this study was to review and summarise the trends of the incidence of stroke in Southern Europe, as well as, to mention stroke subtypes and recognise the risk factors for stroke.

**Methods:** A systematic review in PubMed was conducted.

**Results:** Therefore, twenty-three articles, representing seven countries, related to incidence, type and risk factors of stroke in this specific geographical area of Europe were identified. The annual stroke incidence varied from approximately 1.41 to 3.73 per 1000 population per year. Currently, in all the countries studied, ischemic stroke was the commonest stroke type in all series. Hypertension remains the main risk factor for both ischemic and hemorrhagic strokes, followed by diabetes mellitus, hyperlipidemia and other factors.

**Conclusions:** A wide range of stroke incidence may be due to the different lifestyle and behavioural factors among countries. Further research that uses the best possible methods to study the incidence, type and risk factors of stroke are urgently needed in Balkan Peninsula.

**Keywords:** epidemiology, stroke, incidence, Europe