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A community-based study of chronic fatigue syndrome.

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BACKGROUND: Most previous estimates of the prevalence of chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) have derived largely from treated populations, and have been biased by differential access to health care treatment linked with sex, ethnic identification, and socioeconomic status. **OBJECTIVE:** To assess the point prevalence of CFS in an ethnically diverse random community sample. **DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS:** A sample of 28,673 adults in Chicago, Ill, was screened by telephone, and those with CFS-like symptoms were medically evaluated. **MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES AND ANALYSES:** Self-report questionnaires, psychiatric evaluations, and complete medical examinations with laboratory testing were used to diagnose patients with CFS. Univariate and multivariate statistical techniques were used to delineate the overall rate of CFS in this population, and its relative prevalence was subcategorized by sex, ethnic identification, age, and socioeconomic status. **RESULTS:** There was a 65.1% completion rate for the telephone interviews during the first phase of the study. Findings indicated that CFS occurs in about 0.42% (95% confidence interval, 0.29%-0.56%) of this random community-based sample. The highest levels of CFS were consistently found among women, minority groups, and persons with lower levels of education and occupational status. **CONCLUSIONS:** Chronic fatigue syndrome is a common chronic health condition, especially for women, occurring across ethnic groups. Earlier findings suggesting that CFS is a syndrome primarily affecting white, middle-class patients were not supported by our findings.

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