

Why we should study the Armenian population: a goldmine of public health information

Abstract

The Armenian Population is one of the most genetically continuous populations in the world, today. Studies have shown that due to their geographic, religious, and societal isolation, they have bred almost entirely within their own population for over 4,000 years. The Armenians are also one of the oldest surviving populations in existence. While historically, the Armenians have been a powerful empire, recent travesties have led to their near-elimination. The Armenian Genocide was the first genocide of the twentieth century. Scholars and historians estimate that approximately 1.5 million Armenians were slaughtered at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, a sizable large portion of their population. Events such as mass murder, rape, and torture were well documented during the years The Genocide occurred, from 1914–1923, with the starting date conventionally held on April 24th 1915. Due to the massive loss of life, land, and culture from the Armenian Genocide, Armenia has been through many economic and social reforms, shaking the once iron-clad stability of a civilization that dated back to the Bronze Age. The Armenian population, currently, has one of the highest rates of depression of any recorded country. Due to their genetic continuity, thousands of years of history, and recent societal stressors including the burdens of genocide survival, the Armenian peoples are a treasure trove of public health information that seems to be relatively understudied.

Keywords: armenian population, armenian genocide, public health, Armenian, genocide, survival

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Abbreviations: BC, before christ

Introduction

Historically, the first mention of the Armenian people dates back to the 6th century BC, with most of the documented history occurring after 2000BC (Payaslian & Palgrave Connect, 2007). The Armenians have been a historically unique population, with their own language and alphabet, not rooted in either Greek or Latin.¹ They have also been found to be one of the most genetically continuous populations in the world, today. Their geographic, religious, and societal isolation has resulted in this unique genetic isolation, due to lack of outbreeding with populations other than their own since the Bronze Age.² Geopolitically, the Armenians have remained in a relatively unstable region, with the Armenian Genocide in 1915, being one of the most damaging to the entirety of the population.

This genocide was the first genocide of the twentieth century. Scholars and historians estimate that approximately 1.5 million Armenians were slaughtered at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, a population roughly equal to half of the population of Armenia today.^{3,4} Events such as mass murder, rape, and torture were well documented during the years the genocide occurred, from 1914–1923, with the historic date conventionally held on April 24th 1915. Due to the massive loss of life, land, and culture from the Armenian Genocide, Armenia has been through many economic and social reforms, shaking the once iron-clad stability of a civilization that dated back to before the Bronze Age.^{3,5–7} The Armenian population, now, is struggling with an epidemic of depression amongst its population, possibly cast in place by the geopolitical, social, and historical damage caused by the Armenian Genocide.^{8–11}

Due to their genetic continuity, well-documented history, and

recent societal stressors including the burdens of genocide survival, the Armenian Population is a treasure trove of public health information that is relatively understudied.² By increasing the resources to study the public health in the Armenian Population, more knowledge regarding mental health and medical issues of post-genocide survival can be elucidated. Of interest would be to look at the health effects of bottle-necking caused by the genocide, on a genetically isolated peoples, similar to the bottleneck studies within the Ashkenazi Jewish population.^{12,13} Furthermore, by studying the effects of this genocide on the Armenia's increased rate of depression, more can be understood regarding trans-generational trauma and genocide.^{14,15}

Conclusion

The Armenians are a treasure trove of public health data that is relatively understudied. Their well-documented history, geographical isolation, genetic continuity, relatively high rates of depression, and recent near-annihilation by the Armenian Genocide provides multiple topics of study. From research into genetic studies focusing on bottlenecks, to mental health studies on post-genocide rates of depression, the Armenian Population can contribute vastly to the fields of mental, medical, and public health.

Conflict of Interest

There are no financial conflicts of interest to report.

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