

Spotlight

By M.O.

Gallbladder cancer: unique lessons learned from Chilean women

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<http://doi.wiley.com/10.1002/ijc.25421>

More people die in Chile from gallbladder cancer than in other countries worldwide. In developed countries, gallbladder cancer is rare, and patients are often of Latin descent or native Americans. Survival rates are alarmingly low because of the lack of early symptoms and the spread of the cancer to the liver. Ethnic risk groups are therefore closely monitored especially when a history of gallbladder stones or repeated typhoid fever is present. Notably, gallbladder cancer is twice as common in women than in men and occurs mainly after the age of 50 years.

A new study from the South of Chile tackles the high mortality due to gallbladder cancer in this country. The authors hypothesize that more people die in Chile from gallbladder cancer than anywhere else because of the high baseline population incidence combined with late medical consultations. The authors took advantage of the existence of a cancer registry in the city of Valdivia, a historic town situated in a high-risk province in Southern Chile. They studied 317 registered gallbladder cancer cases; 76% of these were women, 70.3% urban residents and 83% Hispanics with less than 4 years of school. Cancer rates were the highest among female Mapuches, indigenous people of south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina. Mapuche ancestry is very common in Chile (84%) based on mitochondrial DNA polymorphism analysis. The authors hope that their study will trigger more scientific interest in the pathogenesis and etiology of gallbladder cancer in this region.