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1.5 million women of reproductive age in India affected by epilepsy: Experts

12 February 2024 | News

Neuroinfections, head trauma, and metabolic abnormalities significantly contribute to the burden of epilepsy in India



The staggering number of nearly 1.5 million women of reproductive age in India grappling with epilepsy highlights a critical need for tailored care and support. Despite medical advancements, these demographic faces significant challenges, including teratogenic effects of antiepileptic drugs and heightened infertility rates, say experts.

On National Epilepsy Day, neurologists from Amrita Hospital, Kochi, emphasised the urgent need for heightened awareness regarding the early detection and treatment of epileptic seizures in young women. They expressed deep concern over the insufficient attention given to women with epilepsy, influenced by cultural beliefs, social stigma, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure.

Dr Siby Gopinath, Epileptologist and Professor of Neurology at Amrita Hospital, Kochi, stated, "Epilepsy, a neurological disorder characterised by recurrent seizures, affects approximately 50 million individuals worldwide, with a significant portion residing in India, where 10–12 million people are affected. Despite its prevalence, there exists a considerable treatment gap in the management of epilepsy, particularly in low-resource settings like rural areas of India."

Children also bear a substantial impact, with the highest incidence occurring in the first year of life and peaking between ages 1 to 12. Diagnosis in children poses challenges due to various seizure imitators, necessitating evaluation by trained paediatric neurologists.

Accurate diagnosis relies on comprehensive neurological examinations and advanced neuroimaging studies such as electroencephalogram (EEG) and brain scans.

Treatment options encompass pharmacotherapy, surgical interventions, brain-stimulating therapies, and dietary modifications such as ketogenic diets. However, challenges like drug-refractory cases underline the necessity for alternative therapies and precision medicine approaches tailored to individual patients.

Dr Ashok Pillai, Clinical Professor, Advanced Centre for Robotic Surgery, Surgical Oncology, Neurosurgery, Amrita Advanced Centre for Epilepsy, Amrita Hospital, Kochi emphasised, "Screening for epilepsy is vital for early detection and timely intervention. Implementing healthcare practices, careful childbirth management, and essential vaccination protocols are crucial steps in preventing epilepsy. Early detection and awareness contribute to timely intervention, enhancing overall well-being for women and children affected by epilepsy."