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Association of allergic diseases and epilepsy with risk of glioma, meningioma and acoustic neuroma: results from the INTERPHONE international case–control study

Brigitte Schlehofer[1] · Maria Blettner[2] · Monika Moissonnier[3] · Isabelle Deltour[3] · Graham G. Giles[4,5,6] · Bruce Armstrong[7] · Jack Siemiatycki[8] · Marie-Elise Parent[9] · Daniel Krewski[10] · Christoffer Johansen[11] · Anssi Auvinen[12,13] · Anna Lahkola[13] · Martine Hours[14] · Gabriele Berg-Beckhoff[15] · Siegal Sadetzki[16,17,18] · Susanna Lagorio[19] · Toru Takebayashi[20] · Naohito Yamaguchi[21] · Alistair Woodward[22] · Angus Cook[23] · Tore Tynes[24] · Lars Klaboe[25] · Maria Feychting[26] · Richard Feltbower[27] · Anthony Swerdlow[28] · Minouk Schoemaker[28] · Elisabeth Cardis[29,30,31] · Joachim Schüz[3]

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Abstract

We investigated the association of allergic diseases and epilepsy with risk of brain tumours, in Interphone, a 13-country case–control study. Data were obtained from 2693 glioma cases, 2396 meningioma cases, and 1102 acoustic neuroma cases and their 6321 controls. Conditional logistic regression models were used to estimate pooled odds ratios (ORs) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (CIs), adjusted for education and time at interview. Reduced ORs were observed for glioma in relation to physician-diagnosed asthma (OR = 0.73; *CI* 0.58–0.92), hay fever (OR 0.72; *CI* 0.61–0.86), and eczema (OR 0.78, CI 0.64–0.94), but not for meningioma or acoustic neuroma. Previous diagnosis of epilepsy was associated with an increased OR for glioma (2.94; *CI* 1.87–4.63) and for meningioma (2.12; *CI* 1.27–3.56), but not for acoustic neuroma. This large-scale case–control study adds to the growing evidence that people with allergies have a lower risk of developing glioma, but not meningioma or acoustic neuroma. It also supports clinical observations of epilepsy prior to the diagnosis of glioma and meningioma.

Keywords Allergies · Epilepsy · Brain tumours · Multicenter case–control study

Abbreviations

IARC/WHO	International agency for research on cancer/ World Health Organisation
ICD-O	International classification of diseases for oncology
CI	95% Confidence interval
OR	Odds ratio

Introduction

Epidemiological studies have consistently found an inverse association between a history of allergic diseases and risk of glioma, while results were conflicting for meningioma and acoustic neuroma [1–3]**.** Underlying biological mechanisms appear to be complex; however, there is agreement that immunologic functions play an important role in the development of brain tumours, and allergic diseases probably indicate an effective immunosurveillance system [1, 2]. Epilepsy or epileptic seizures can occur as early symptoms of brain tumors and it has been hypothesized that seizure susceptibility increases due to interaction between tumor cell metabolism and the neuronal network [4, 5].

Interphone is an international multi-center case–control study carried out in 13 countries and coordinated by IARC/WHO [6]. It focused on the association between mobile phone use and brain tumours, but data on allergic diseases and epilepsy were also collected. Here we report the results from the analysis of the pooled data set from the sixteen study centers on the associations between history of allergic diseases and epilepsy and risk of glioma, meningioma and acoustic neuroma.

✉ Joachim Schüz
schuzj@iarc.fr

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Methods

The study population consists of incident, histologically or imaging-confirmed cases of glioma, meningioma and acoustic neuroma occurring between 2000 and 2004, 30–59 years old at diagnosis and their controls (sampled in frequency-matched manner and post-hoc individually assigned with one per case for glioma and meningioma, two per case for acoustic neuroma). Controls were matched on age, sex, and study region (for details see [6, 7]).

Interviews were performed by trained interviewers, mainly using a computer-assisted questionnaire, either face-to-face (93.9% cases, 99.5% controls) or by telephone. Proxy interviews were conducted when the participant was too ill or deceased. This was the case for 336 glioma cases, 41 meningioma cases, 3 acoustic neuroma cases and 40 controls. The interview captured information on mobile phone use, ionizing and non-ionizing medical radiation exposures, socio-demographic factors and other potential risk factors for brain tumours. In addition, a history of various physician-diagnosed medical conditions, were asked, including diagnoses of asthma, hay fever, and eczema; which are conditions thought to reflect allergic reactions. Details were asked about the age at onset of these diseases, and for eczema the age when the symptoms stopped. Similar questions were asked for epilepsy.

Statistical approaches followed the strategy of all analyses of the Interphone study (for details see [6, 7]). Conditional logistic regression models were used to estimate pooled odds ratios (ORs) and their 95% confidence intervals (CIs), adjusted for education and time interval between case and respective control interviews. Analyses were performed for each brain tumour type, and for men and women separately, or–if analysis was performed for men and women combined–adjusted for gender. Subgroup analyses were done separately for high-grade (type III-IV) and low-grade (type I and II) glioma, based on ICD-O morphological codes (details see [6, 7]).

Reference categories were defined as "never diagnosed with allergy" and"never diagnosed with epilepsy", respectively, as reported by the study subjects. Only diagnoses that occurred up to two years prior to the tumour diagnosis (cases) or reference date (controls; date of diagnosis of corresponding case) were included. Missing data was less than 5% for epilepsy and less than 1% for the allergies.

For each asthma, hay fever, and eczema, we created a binary variable (ever/never). We also investigated whether time since first diagnosis (<10 years, 10–19 years, ≥ 20 years) or age at onset (<10 years, 10–19 years, ≥ 20 years) was associated with the diseases. For eczema, we distinguished past and current rash. We also estimated ORs for one or more than one allergy compared with no allergy. Sensitivity analyses were performed by excluding proxy interviews and by including smoking as a potential confounder, but made no difference to the main results (data not shown).

Results

In total, the analyses included data from 2693 glioma cases (62.6% response rate), 2396 meningioma cases (76.9%) and 1102 acoustic neuroma cases (81.0%) and 6321 control subjects (44%). The distribution of cases and controls by selected demographic factors is presented in Supplementary Table 1. For all tumour types, educational level was slightly higher for controls than for cases.

For glioma, ORs below 1 were found for participants who were ever diagnosed with asthma (OR 0.73, *CI* 0.58–0.92), hay fever (OR 0.72, *CI* 0.61–0.86) or eczema (OR 0.78, *CI* 0.64–0.94), or "any allergy" (OR 0.71, *CI* 0.61–0.82) (Table 1). The result for eczema was driven by those with current rash. ORs were lowest when the allergies occurred less than ten years before glioma tumour diagnosis, and for those whose allergies started in adulthood. Subdivision into high grade and low grade glioma showed that the decrease was driven by the results for high-grade glioma (Table 1). For meningioma, no association was seen in relation to asthma (OR 0.91, CI 0.72–1.14) or to hay fever (OR 0.91, CI 0.76–1.10), but eczema showed a slightly lower risk (OR 0.84, CI 0.70–1.02), that was more pronounced for those with current rash (OR 0.76; CI 0.60–0.95) (Table 1). For both tumour types there was little difference in ORs between men and women, but for hay fever and eczema the ORs for men were somewhat lower (Table 2).

For acoustic neuroma no association was found with asthma (OR 1.02, CI 0.75–1.37), hay fever (OR 0.91, CI 0.72–1.14), or eczema (OR 1.02, CI 0.78–1.32), overall and by time since start of the allergy or by age at onset. The results were similar for men and women (Tables 1 and 2).

A prior diagnosis of epilepsy was associated with an increased OR for glioma (OR 2.94, CI 1.87–4.63) and for meningioma (OR 2.12, CI 1.27–3.56) (Table1). Subgroup analyses for glioma and meningioma and epilepsy were based on small numbers (Tables 1 and 2). However, for both glioma and meningioma, sex-specific analyses revealed higher risks for men than for women. The OR was higher for low-grade glioma (OR 5.71, CI 2.48–13.1) compared with high-grade glioma (OR 2.01, CI 1.14–3.54). For both glioma and meningioma, the highest ORs were seen for adult-onset epilepsy, and for subjects whose epilepsy was diagnosed less than 10 years before the reference date. ORs were not increased for acoustic neuroma (Table 1), however, analyses were based on small numbers of subjects with epilepsy.

Table 1 Association between tumour and allergy or epilepsy, by time since start[1] and age at onset[2]

	Glioma		Low grade glioma		High grade glioma		Meningioma		Acoustic neuroma	
	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI-)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)
Asthma										
Ever/never										
Never	2453/2630	1.00	751/797	1.00	1678/1805	1.00	2161/2377	1.00	1001/1928	1.00
Ever	220/303	0.73 (0.58–0.92)	82/107	0.89 (0.60–1.34)	137/196	0.65 (0.49–0.87)	228/263	0.91 (0.72–1.14)	99/204	1.02 (0.75–1.37)
Time since start										
Never	2453/2630	1.00	751/797	1.00	1678/1805	1.00	2161/2377	1.00	1001/1928	1.00
< 10 years	49/92	0.67 (0.44–1.02)	25/29	1.05 (0.53–2.08)	23/63	0.47 (0.26–0.85)	66/73	0.91 (0.62–1.34)	34/70	0.99 (0.59–1.64)
10–19 years	37/60	0.53 (0.32–0.88)	18/25	0.80 (0.37–1.74)	19/35	0.36 (0.17–0.76)	54/51	1.18 (0.71–1.94)	13/32	0.62 (0.28–1.37)
20 + years	134/151	0.85 (0.63–1.15)	39/53	0.84 (0.48–1.49)	95/98	0.84 (0.59–1.21)	108/139	0.83 (0.61–1.13)	52/102	1.20 (0.80–1.80)
Age at onset										
Never	2453/2630	1.00	751/797	1.00	1678/1805	1.00	2161/2377	1.00	1001/1928	1.00
Child (0–9)	93/103	0.80 (0.56–1.15)	22/38	0.66 (0.33–1.30)	71/65	0.87 (0.57–1.33)	53/82	0.57 (0.36–0.89)	36/61	1.30 (0.79–2.15)
Young (10–19)	39/43	0.95 (0.55–1.64)	17/20	0.83 (0.36–1.92)	22/23	1.09 (0.54–2.23)	39/33	1.37 (0.79–2.40)	15/30	1.29 (0.60–2.78)
Adult (20 +)	88/157	0.62 (0.45–0.86)	43/49	1.09 (0.64–1.86)	44/108	0.40 (0.26–0.63)	136/148	1.00 (0.75–1.33)	48/113	0.81 (0.54–1.23)
Hay fever										
Ever/never										
Never	2251/2365	1.00	684/713	1.00	1546/1628	1.00	2006/2162	1.00	895/1720	1.00
Ever	410/558	0.72 (0.61–0.86)	150/194	0.86 (0.63–1.15)	256/360	0.67 (0.54–0.84)	370/465	0.91 (0.76–1.10)	201/402	0.91 (0.72–1.14)
Time since start										
Never	2251/2365	1.00	684/713	1.00	1546/1628	1.00	2006/2162	1.00	895/1720	1.00
< 10 years	80/117	0.67 (0.47–0.96)	30/41	0.99 (0.57–1.73)	49/76	0.53 (0.33–0.85)	82/105	0.96 (0.66–1.40)	54/99	0.95 (0.61–1.48)
10–19 years	75/126	0.56 (0.39–0.79)	28/48	0.52 (0.27–0.99)	46/76	0.57 (0.36–0.89)	83/109	0.86 (0.61–1.21)	41/92	0.77 (0.49–1.22)
20+ years	255/315	0.81 (0.66–1.01)	92/105	0.95 (0.65–1.38)	161/208	0.77 (0.59–1.01)	205/251	0.92 (0.73–1.16)	106/211	0.95 (0.71–1.28)
Age at onset (years)										
Never	2251/2365	1.00	684/713	1.00	1546/1628	1.00	2006/2162	1.00	895/1720	1.00
0–9	89/107	0.84 (0.59–1.21)	34/39	0.99 (0.55–1.78)	55/67	0.77 (0.48–1.24)	58/68	1.04 (0.68–1.58)	32/64	0.96 (0.58–1.59)
10–19	131/174	0.75 (0.56–1.00)	51/69	0.80 (0.50–1.28)	79/103	0.77 (0.53–1.12)	106/128	0.85 (0.63–1.16)	59/122	0.95 (0.64–1.39)
20 +	190/277	0.67 (0.53–0.84)	65/86	0.84 (0.55–1.28)	122/190	0.60 (0.45–0.80)	206/269	0.92 (0.72–1.16)	110/216	0.87 (0.64–1.18)
Eczema										
Ever/never										
Never	2350/2491	1.00	723/762	1.00	1605/1707	1.00	2064/2207	1.00	954/1791	1.00
Ever	313/435	0.78 (0.64–0.94)	110/145	0.73 (0.51–1.03)	200/284	0.78 (0.61–0.98)	316/426	0.84 (0.70–1.02)	145/333	1.02 (0.78–1.32)
Time since start (years)										
Never	2350/2491	1.00	723/762	1.00	1605/1707	1.00	2064/2207	1.00	954/1791	1.00
< 10	55/108	0.58 (0.39–0.85)	21/41	0.48 (0.25–0.92)	34/65	0.66 (0.40–1.08)	58/97	0.81 (0.55–1.21)	26/81	0.79 (0.46–1.37)
10–19	69/83	0.91 (0.62–1.34)	24/23	0.79 (0.37–1.67)	43/59	0.87 (0.54–1.40)	66/73	1.03 (0.68–1.55)	32/70	1.09 (0.64–1.87)

Table 1 (continued)

	Glioma		Low grade glioma		High grade glioma		Meningioma		Acoustic neuroma	
	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI-)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)
20+	189/244	0.82 (0.65–1.05)	65/81	0.85 (0.56–1.31)	123/160	0.79 (0.59–1.07)	192/256	0.81 (0.64–1.02)	87/182	1.09 (0.79–1.51)
Age at onset (years)										
Never	2350/2491	1.00	723/762	1.00	1605/1707	1.00	2064/2207	1.00	954/1791	1.00
0–9	93/125	0.75 (0.53–1.05)	35/51	0.75 (0.44–1.27)	57/70	0.76 (0.48–1.21)	89/108	0.81 (0.59–1.13)	44/92	0.93 (0.60–1.44)
10–19	77/87	1.07 (0.74–1.54)	29/25	1.10 (0.55–2.19)	47/62	0.98 (0.63–1.55)	67/97	0.83 (0.57–1.21)	33/65	1.36 (0.80–2.31)
20+	143/223	0.68 (0.53–0.89)	46/69	0.57 (0.34–0.94)	96/152	0.70 (0.51–0.97)	160/221	0.87 (0.67–1.12)	68/176	0.96 (0.67–1.37)
Past/current										
Never	2348/2485	1.00	722/761	1.00	1604/1702	1.00	2060/2200	1.00	954/1784	1.00
Past	127/138	1.01 (0.74–1.37)	47/44	1.01 (0.58–1.77)	79/93	0.95 (0.65–1.39)	125/135	1.03 (0.75–1.40)	55/107	1.13 (0.73–1.74)
Current	179/291	0.67 (0.53–0.85)	61/98	0.63 (0.42–0.95)	116/188	0.68 (0.51–0.91)	184/283	0.76 (0.60–0.95)	87/218	0.96 (0.71–1.32)
Allergies										
Any allergy										
None	1903/1894	1.00	568/565	1.00	1316/1309	1.00	1661/1731	1.00	757/1393	1.00
At least one	721/989	0.71 (0.61–0.82)	253/327	0.78 (0.60–1.01)	462/654	0.67 (0.56–0.80)	699/878	0.86 (0.74–1.00)	336/715	0.91 (0.75–1.11)
Time since start (years)										
Never	1903/1894	1.00	568/565	1.00	1316/1309	1.00	1661/1731	1.00	757/1393	1.00
<10	126/229	0.56 (0.42–0.74)	47/74	0.68 (0.42–1.09)	78/154	0.50 (0.35–0.71)	135/189	0.77 (0.58–1.03)	81/178	0.85 (0.59–1.21)
10–19	137/196	0.65 (0.49–0.86)	51/68	0.63 (0.38–1.03)	83/126	0.61 (0.43–0.87)	144/177	0.84 (0.63–1.12)	65/145	0.81 (0.55–1.17)
20+	458/564	0.79 (0.66–0.94)	155/185	0.88 (0.65–1.20)	301/374	0.75 (0.61–0.93)	420/512	0.89 (0.75–1.06)	190/392	0.98 (0.77–1.24)
Age at onset (years)										
Never	1903/1894	1.00	568/565	1.00	1316/1309	1.00	1661/1731	1.00	757/1393	1.00
0–9	215/281	0.71 (0.56–0.90)	72/104	0.77 (0.52–1.15)	142/172	0.69 (0.51–0.94)	171/209	0.83 (0.64–1.07)	87/177	0.95 (0.68–1.32)
10–19	193/233	0.84 (0.65–1.07)	76/82	0.89 (0.57–1.38)	115/150	0.80 (0.59–1.10)	169/202	0.93 (0.72–1.20)	82/167	1.06 (0.75–1.49)
20+	313/475	0.65 (0.53–0.78)	105/141	0.73 (0.51–1.04)	205/332	0.60 (0.47–0.76)	359/467	0.84 (0.70–1.02)	167/371	0.83 (0.64–1.07)
Epilepsy										
Ever/never										
Never	2499/2811	1.00	775/882	1.00	1701/1902	1.00	2276/2532	1.00	1061/2057	1.00
Ever	101/33	2.94 (1.87–4.63)	48/10	5.71 (2.48–13.1)	52/23	2.01 (1.14–3.54)	61/32	2.12 (1.27–3.56)	17/26	1.44 (0.68–3.07)
Time since start (years)										
Never	2499/2811	1.00	775/882	1.00	1701/1902	1.00	2276/2532	1.00	1061/2057	1.00
<10	52/7	8.44 (3.28–21.7)	25/2	21.7 (2.89–163)	26/5	5.09 (1.66–15.6)	21/5	6.73 (1.90–23.9)	1/8	0.16 (0.01–1.84)
10–19	21/4	3.62 (1.09–12.0)	14/3	3.64 (0.91–14.5)	7/1	3.38 (0.38–30.4)	12/2	4.37 (0.83–22.9)	5/2	15.7 (1.00–242)
20+	28/22	1.28 (0.67–2.46)	9/5	2.15 (0.50–9.23)	19/17	1.09 (0.51–2.32)	28/25	1.32 (0.71–2.43)	11/16	1.70 (0.68–4.28)
Age at onset (years)										
Never	2499/2811	1.00	775/882	1.00	1701/1902	1.00	2276/2532	1.00	1061/2057	1.00

Table 1 (continued)

	Glioma		Low grade glioma		High grade glioma		Meningioma		Acoustic neuroma	
	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI-)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)
0–9	9/10	0.97 (0.31–2.99)	5/3	3.52 (0.33–37.8)	4/7	0.63 (0.16–2.45)	14/13	1.24 (0.51–3.02)	3/5	1.38 (0.32–6.02)
10–19	15/11	0.94 (0.38–2.33)	7/3	1.72 (0.39–7.57)	8/8	0.61 (0.18–2.02)	10/5	1.52 (0.45–5.10)	6/8	2.66 (0.72–9.76)
20+	77/12	6.61 (3.30–13.2)	36/4	10.68 (3.15–36)	40/8	4.89 (2.07–11.6)	37/14	3.35 (1.58–7.10)	8/13	0.90 (0.27–2.98)

[a]Between first diagnosis by a physician and two years before tumour diagnosis (cases) or reference date (controls)

[b]Reference category (never): no diagnosis of disease up to two years before tumour diagnosis (cases) or reference date (controls); adjusted for education and time at interview; cases and controls answering "don't know" for a disease or having missing values in the adjustment variables were excluded from analyses

Discussion

These results presented were based on data from all Interphone study centres [6, 7]. Some differences in results published from single or smaller groups of study centres [e.g. 3, as most recent], may be due to chance or to differences in participation rates, prevalence of specific diseases or other factors.

Allergic diseases

We found inverse associations of asthma, hay fever and eczema with risk of glioma, especially for high-grade glioma, for both men and women. Allergic diseases diagnosed closer to the diagnosis of the high-grade glioma (less than 10 years) were associated with lower ORs than those diagnosed earlier and at early ages. Our findings are consistent with previous studies, a recent meta-analysis [8] and review [9]. Overall, no association was seen between low-grade glioma, meningioma, and acoustic neuroma with any of the three allergic diseases [1]. Decreased ORs were observed, however, for low grade glioma and for meningioma for those who at time of interview reported current eczema.

Prospective studies found lower levels of total or respiratory-specific immunoglobulin IgE, a biomarker of allergy, in glioma patients, strengthening our observation of an inverse association [1, 8]. The underlying biogenetic mechanism is not fully understood. The immediate hypersensitivity reactions of these three allergies are mediated by IgE, and this may be influenced by preclinical tumours. Further investigations of immunologic mechanisms, for example in the immunosurveillance system, and investigations of germline SNPs or genetic risk factors are needed for better understanding of the mechanism [2].

History of epilepsy

In line with earlier epidemiological studies and clinical observations, we found elevated ORs of glioma and meningioma in relation to past epilepsy with the highest ORs for low-grade glioma, a finding also described by other studies [4]. No association was seen between history of epilepsy and acoustic neuroma but numbers of subjects were small. Epilepsy and epileptic seizures prior, but close to the diagnosis of glioma or meningioma are known to be important symptoms of brain tumours as an early warning sign and a prognostic factor for survival [5]. Different hypotheses concerning the epileptogenesis in tumour cells and peritumoral cells have been discussed, e.g. that an

Table 2 Association between tumour and allergy or epilepsy, by gender[1]

	Glioma–men		Glioma–women		Meningioma–men		Meningioma–women		Acoustic neuroma–men		Acoustic neuroma–women	
	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)	Cases/controls	OR (95% CI)
Asthma												
Never	1477/1590	1.00	976/1040	1.00	519/575	1.00	1642/1802	1.00	488/943	1.00	513/985	1.00
Ever	127/165	0.75 (0.55–1.02)	93/138	0.71 (0.50–1.02)	45/52	1.00 (0.61–1.63)	183/211	0.88 (0.68–1.14)	47/87	1.02 (0.63–1.63)	52/117	0.95 (0.64–1.42)
Hay fever												
Never	1360/1428	1.00	891/937	1.00	483/533	1.00	1523/1629	1.00	440/843	1.00	455/877	1.00
Ever	234/319	0.67 (0.53–0.85)	176/239	0.75 (0.58–0.98)	81/95	0.87 (0.58–1.31)	289/370	0.91 (0.74–1.12)	93/181	0.93 (0.65–1.32)	108/221	0.85 (0.62–1.16)
Eczema												
Never	1446/1536	1.00	904/955	1.00	521/552	1.00	1543/1655	1.00	473/898	1.00	481/893	1.00
Ever	150/214	0.74 (0.56–0.97)	163/221	0.80 (0.61–1.05)	44/78	0.59 (0.36–0.94)	272/348	0.91 (0.74–1.12)	62/129	1.01 (0.65–1.55)	83/204	1.04 (0.74–1.45)
Any allergy												
None	1174/1176	1.00	729/718	1.00	423/445	1.00	1238/1286	1.00	378/708	1.00	379/685	1.00
1 and more	400/549	0.66 (0.54–0.80)	321/440	0.75 (0.6–0.94)	137/177	0.77 (0.56–1.06)	562/701	0.88 (0.74–1.04)	153/309	0.93 (0.69–1.27)	183/406	0.87 (0.67–1.14)
Epilepsy												
Never	1493/1675	1.00	1006/1136	1.00	530/603	1.00	1746/1929	1.00	514/989	1.00	547/1068	1.00
Ever	62/20	3.71 (2.02–6.82)	39/13	2.37 (1.16–4.81)	20/5	5.46 (1.67–17.8)	41/27	1.55 (0.86–2.79)	8/11	2.23 (0.65–7.66)	9/15	1.26 (0.46–3.43)

[a]Reference category (never): no symptoms of disease up to two years before tumour diagnosis (cases) or reference date (controls); adjusted for education and time at interview; cases and controls answering "don't know" for a disease or had missing values in the adjustment variables were excluded from analyses

aberrant tumour cell metabolism may influence the neuronal network leading to seizures [4, 10].

Strengths and limitations

This is to our knowledge the largest ever case–control study on this topic. With all centres following the same study protocol, no compromises had to be made when pooling the data. Participation proportions in cases (glioma 63%, meningioma 77% and acoustic neuroma 81%) were high and the distribution of cases by sex and age was as to be expected for the respective tumours types. For glioma, proxy interviews were used for 12% of cases, but excluding them had little effect on the results. Main limitations were the low response proportion among controls and the fact that all data on medical diagnoses were based on self-reports of a physician diagnosis, leading to concerns about potential selection and recall bias.

Selection bias was of particular concern as response rates did somewhat differ by education (lower with shorter education) and prevalence of allergies may also differ by education; but in fact the association between allergies and education was weak (data not shown). Odds ratios with or without adjustment for education did hardly differ. Stratified analysis by education did not show any differences for glioma. For meningioma, the odds ratios differed slightly between groups, but were close to 1 for any educational level. Hence we conclude that the inverse association for glioma is not due to selection bias but the minor decrease in odds ratios for meningioma may well be.

Conclusions

Findings from this large-scale, international case–control study with a representative distribution of cases for the respective tumour types, add to the growing evidence that people with allergies have a lower risk of glioma than those without allergies, especially for high-grade glioma, but not for meningioma or acoustic neuroma. It also confirms the association between epilepsy and glioma and meningioma, most likely due to epilepsy being a symptom for a sizeable proportion of these tumours.

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Authors and Affiliations

Brigitte Schlehofer[1] · Maria Blettner[2] · Monika Moissonnier[3] · Isabelle Deltour[3] · Graham G. Giles[4,5,6] · Bruce Armstrong[7] · Jack Siemiatycki[8] · Marie-Elise Parent[9] · Daniel Krewski[10] · Christoffer Johansen[11] · Anssi Auvinen[12,13] · Anna Lahkola[13] · Martine Hours[14] · Gabriele Berg-Beckhoff[15] · Siegal Sadetzki[16,17,18] · Susanna Lagorio[19] · Toru Takebayashi[20] · Naohito Yamaguchi[21] · Alistair Woodward[22] · Angus Cook[23] · Tore Tynes[24] · Lars Klaboe[25] · Maria Feychting[26] · Richard Feltbower[27] · Anthony Swerdlow[28] · Minouk Schoemaker[28] · Elisabeth Cardis[29,30,31] · Joachim Schüz[3]

1 Leimen, Germany (retired); formerly: Unit of Environmental Epidemiology, German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany

2 Institute of Medical Biostatistics, Epidemiology and Informatics, University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany

3 International Agency for Research On Cancer (IARC/WHO), Environment and Lifestyle Epidemiology Branch, Lyon, France

4 Cancer Epidemiology Division, Cancer Council Victoria, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

5 Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne, Parkville, VIC, Australia

6 Precision Medicine, School of Clinical Sciences at Monash Health, Monash University, Clayton, VIC, Australia

7 School of Public Health, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

8 University of Montreal, Montreal, Canada

9 Institut National de La Recherche Scientifique (INRS), Laval, Canada

10 McLaughlin Centre for Population Health Risk Assessment, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

11 Center for Surgery and Cancer, Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen, Denmark

12 Faculty of Social Sciences, Tampere University, Tampere, Finland

13 STUK Radiation and Nuclear Safety Authority, Environmental Radiation Surveillance, Helsinki, Finland

14 Université Lyon 1, IFSTTAR, UMRESTTE, Bron, France

15 Unit for Health Promotion Research, Department of Public Health, and Hospital South West Jutland Esbjerg, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark

16 Cancer & Radiation Epidemiology Unit, Gertner Institute for Epidemiology & Health Policy Research, Sheba Medical Center, Tel-Hashomer, Israel

17 Sackler Faculty of Medicine, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

18 Ministry of Health, Jerusalem, Israel

19 Department of Oncology and Molecular Medicine, Istituto Superiore Di Sanità, Rome, Italy

20 Department of Preventive Medicine and Public Health, Keio University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan

21 Department of Public Health, Tokyo Women's Medical University School of Medicine, Tokyo, Japan

22 School of Population Health, University of Auckland, Auckland, New Zealand

23 Population and Global Health, The University of Western Australia, Perth, WA, Australia

24 National Institute of Occupational Health, Oslo, Norway

25 Norwegian Radiation Protection Authority, Østerås; The Cancer Registry of Norway, Oslo, Norway

26 Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

27 School of Medicine, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK

28 Institute of Cancer Research, Sutton, UK

29 Barcelona Institute of Global Health (ISGlobal), Barcelona, Spain

30 University Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, Spain

31 CIBER Epidemiologia Y Salud Pública, Madrid, Spain