ATOPIC DERMATITIS: BEYOND THE SKIN

IMPACTS ON QUALITY OF LIFE IN MEXICO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Atopic dermatitis (AD) is a chronic inflammatory skin disease estimated to affect more than 10% of the population in Mexico (Guevara-Sanginés et al., 2020). Although AD is a treatable condition, it is not curable, and thus impacts millions of lives in different ways, requiring comprehensive care. However, in Mexico, there is a lack of detailed information on the quality-of-life impacts associated with AD—information that policymakers, civil society organizations, and affected individuals could use to manage the condition better.

In response to this gap, Fundación IDEA, Fundación IMSS, and the Mexican Foundation for Dermatology (FMD) have combined their efforts to deepen understanding and generate evidence about AD in Mexico. In 2021, they conducted a diagnosis of the overall state of AD in the country and identified the main barriers to its effective diagnosis and treatment. This initiative, which included roundtables with key actors from the public and private sectors, civil society, clinical professionals, individuals with AD, and their caregivers, resulted in an **Executive Report** (available in Spanish) outlining challenges and public policy recommendations to address the challenges of AD in Mexico. As a follow-up and part of their efforts to produce detailed information on the quality-of-life impacts of the disease, in 2023, the authors launched a groundbreaking study focused on exploring the lived experiences of individuals with AD and their close circles. By capturing the multiple repercussions of AD on people's quality of life, the organizations aim to generate data that can guide the design and implementation of adequate care and support strategies.

To obtain the findings presented in this study, the authoring organizations conducted an online survey and in-depth interviews with individuals living with AD and caregivers of people with AD. This analysis provided a broad perspective from over 650 individuals affected directly or indirectly by the condition. The following is a summary of the main findings of the study, which include the physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts of AD.

PHYSICAL

Direct effects of AD on the skin such as redness, itching, and inflammation. Related conditions and comorbidities. Impact on daily activities and physical well-being.

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Emotional and mental health impact, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, stemming from physical appearance and the discomfort caused by AD.

SOCIAL

The influence of AD on relationships and social activities, including possible stigmatization and limitations in social life.

ECONOMIC

Direct and indirect financial costs associated with having AD.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Fundación IDEA

Fundación IDEA, A.C. is a nonprofit, independent, nonpartisan research center focused on public policy in Mexico and Latin America. With 20 years of experience, we specialize in designing, evaluating, analyzing, and implementing public and private policies and programs. Our mission is to promote evidence in decision-making, planning, and strategy development to help the public and private sectors achieve their economic, social, and political goals. Through rigorous research, we generate high-value ideas and information and offer innovative, feasible, and high-quality solutions for our beneficiaries, funders, and partners.

Fundación Mexicana para la Dermatología

The Mexican Foundation for Dermatology (FMD) is a nonprofit civil association founded in 1994 by dermatology specialists to inform the general public about various skin diseases and conditions and proper skincare. The physicians who make up the FMD conduct free screening campaigns for skin conditions affecting the Mexican population, support scientific research, and promote ongoing medical education.

Fundación IMSS

The Mexican Foundation for Dermatology (FMD) is a nonprofit civil association founded in 1994 by dermatology specialists to inform the general public about various skin diseases and conditions and proper skincare. The physicians who make up the FMD conduct free screening campaigns for skin conditions affecting the Mexican population, support scientific research, and promote ongoing medical education.

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KEY FINDINGS

Physical Impacts

The impact of AD on physical health goes beyond its effects on the skin. People with AD often experience allergic comorbidities, among others. In addition, the symptoms of the disease disrupt fundamental aspects of daily life such as sleep, diet, and the ability to exercise. To manage these challenges, individuals with AD must constantly adapt and reconsider their daily routines. This impact is not limited to those directly affected by the condition—it also extends to caregivers, who must adjust their own lives and may experience disruptions to their physical well-being, such as sleep. These wide-ranging physical effects highlight the need for both individuals with AD and their caregivers to have access to multidisciplinary care that takes all of these consequences into account.

Psychological Impacts

The burden of AD extends into the psychological realm, where the effects of the disease impact the emotional well-being of both individuals with AD and their caregivers. Anxiety and depression are common among those affected, as a result of both the condition itself and the challenges of managing it. Additionally, many individuals experience lowered self-esteem due to the visible manifestations of AD, which often cause shame and discomfort. These factors combined can lead to social isolation for those living with the disease. Caregivers, in turn, face constant stress and worry related to their role, which is associated with feelings of exhaustion, anxiety, and depression. These circumstances would require access to psychological and psychiatric support. Unfortunately, both individuals with AD and their caregivers often face significant barriers in accessing such mental health services. This lack of access is a key obstacle to improving their quality of life.

Social Impacts

AD significantly affects how individuals engage socially. Stigmatization toward people with AD, along with the precautions required for managing the condition, often limits their participation in social and recreational activities and can even lead to reduced physical contact with others. These challenges can arise even within close personal circles, as relationships with partners and family may be strained by the adjustments in daily routines imposed by the disease. Caregivers also struggle to balance their caregiving responsibilities with personal time and social relationships. Both individuals with AD and their caregivers would benefit from a more informed and empathetic society, as well as access to formal support networks.

Economic Impacts

AD places a significant financial burden on families, both in terms of direct and indirect costs. Depending on the severity of the condition, healthcare-related expenses can consume between 10% and 60% of a family's budget. This is mainly because people with AD often seek care in the private sector to access specialized professionals, as well as the ongoing need to purchase medications and other treatments. Moreover, the disease frequently affects the productivity and educational and employment opportunities of both those living with AD and their caregivers. In particular, school or work absences related to managing the condition can impact academic and career plans, limiting long-term income potential. In some cases, individuals may change their career plans entirely to better balance their responsibilities with the demands of unpaid caregiving for themselves or others. This underlines the importance of improving access to appropriate care and creating supportive conditions in workplaces and educational settings that enable people with AD to thrive.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

The wide-ranging impact of AD on people's quality of life highlights the urgent need to promote initiatives from multiple fronts to help mitigate the adverse effects of the disease. Implementing these measures requires a joint effort from both the public and private sectors and support from society at large. Through focused and collaborative actions, it is possible to significantly improve the quality of life of those affected by AD in Mexico, moving toward a society that upholds the rights of all individuals.

We invite you to read the full document (available in Spanish) by scanning the QR code below: