
Impact of Allergic Rhinitis on Academic Performance in Adolescents and Adults: a Bayesian Analysis of MASK-air® Real-world Direct Patient Data

Vieira RJ^{1,2}, Pereira AM^{1,3,4}, Papadopoulos NG⁵, Zuberbier T^{6,7}, Pham-Thi N^{8,9,10}, Giovannini M^{11,12}, Melén E^{13,14}, Azevedo LF^{1,2}, Fonseca JA^{1,2}, Bousquet J^{6,7,15}, Sousa-Pinto B^{1,2}

¹MEDCIDS - Department of Community Medicine, Information and Health Decision Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

²CINTESIS@RISE - Centre for Health Technology and Services Research, Health Research Network, Faculty of Medicine, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

³Allergy Unit, Instituto and Hospital CUF, Porto, Portugal

⁴PaCeIT - Patient Centered Innovation and Technologies, Center for Health Technology and Services Research (CINTESIS), Faculty of Medicine, University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

⁵Allergy Department, 2nd Pediatric Clinic, University of Athens, Athens, Greece

⁶Fraunhofer Institute for Translational Medicine and Pharmacology ITMP, Immunology and Allergology, Berlin, Germany

⁷Institute of Allergology, Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Corporate Member of Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

⁸Ecole Polytechnique de Palaiseau, Palaiseau, France

⁹IRBA (Institut de Recherche Bio-Médicale des Armées), Brétigny sur Orge, France.

¹⁰Université Paris Cité, Paris, France

¹¹Allergy Unit, Department of Pediatrics, Meyer Children's University Hospital IRCCS, Florence, Italy

¹²Department of Health Sciences, University of Florence, Florence, Italy

¹³Sach's Children and Youth Hospital, Södersjukhuset, Stockholm, Sweden

¹⁴Department of Clinical Science and Education, Södersjukhuset, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden

¹⁵MASK-air, Montpellier, France

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Previous studies have shown that allergic rhinitis (AR) can negatively impact academic performance [1,2]. Real-world

data provide improved knowledge in this field [3], particularly by helping to quantify how the control and treatment of AR affect academic performance. In this study, we aimed to use real-world patient data to quantify the proportion of school hours lost per week according to (1) control of allergic disease and (2) asthma-associated multimorbidity.

We conducted a cross-sectional analysis of data from the MASK-air® mobile app. MASK-air is a Best Practice of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and is freely available in 29 countries. The MASK-air app encompasses a daily monitoring questionnaire enabling patients to register their symptoms and medication usage [4]. In addition, MASK-air includes, as an optional questionnaire, the Work Productivity and Activity Impairment Questionnaire plus Classroom Impairment Questions: Allergy Specific (WPAI+CIQ:AS) [5,6]. This questionnaire assesses academic absenteeism (hours of school or classes missed in the previous 7 days owing to allergies), presenteeism (perceived impact of allergy symptoms on academic productivity [attention span, comprehension, and taking tests] in students not missing classes), and total duration of impaired academic performance (absenteeism + presenteeism).

We assessed MASK-air users aged between 13-16 years (depending on the age of digital consent in the country [7]) and 29 years.

We performed 2 separate analyses. For the first, we assessed the percentage of school hours lost (due to absenteeism, presenteeism, and total impairment) by level of AR control. To do so, we included data from all weeks where patients responded to the MASK-air daily monitoring questionnaire on at least 5 days and then completed the WPAI+CIQ:AS questionnaire. We applied a previously described longitudinal k-means-based approach to classify weeks according to disease control [8]. This enabled us to identify (in an unsupervised way and considering the longitudinal nature of the data) weekly patterns based on the visual analog scale applied to assess the overall impact of allergy symptoms reported on the different days of each week. In this study, we classified weeks into well-controlled or uncontrolled (the latter including the weeks with partial, variable, and poor control described in the original study [8]). A stratified analysis was performed according to whether patients had AR alone or AR+self-reported asthma.

For the second analysis, we included all individual responses to the WPAI+CIQ:AS questionnaire irrespective of the number of daily monitoring questionnaires in the respective weeks and compared the percentage of school hours lost between patients with AR alone and patients with AR+asthma.

For both analyses, we employed Bayesian methods, modelling the probability of losing 1 hour [9]. We used a β distribution defined by mean and precision (respectively with the noninformative uniform priors $\text{dunif}[0,1]$ and $\text{dunif}[0,1000]$). We updated these priors based on data

collected from the WPAI+CIQ:AS questionnaire in MASK-air, assuming that the proportion of hours lost in a week could be approximated using a binomial distribution. For all analyses, we ran a minimum of 20 000 iterations. The percentage of academic hours lost were described using the median (IQR) of the respective posterior predictive distributions (more information can be found in the Supplementary Methods).

Data from 91 weeks and 70 patients enabled us to assess the impact of disease control on academic performance (mean [SD] participant age, 21.0 [3.8] years), including 37 weeks with well-controlled AR and 54 weeks with uncontrolled AR (considering all patients with AR, regardless of asthma state) (Tables S1-2 and Figure S1). Median absenteeism per week in AR was 0.1% hours lost (0.0%-1.7%) for well-controlled weeks and 1.1% (0.0%-13.5%) for uncontrolled weeks (Table S2). Regarding presenteeism, the median impact was 8.7% hours lost (1.8%-24.0%) for well-controlled weeks and 32.8% (15.4%-55.4%) for uncontrolled weeks (Table S2 and Figure).

For the comparison between AR alone and AR+asthma, we included 662 responses to the WPAI+CIQ:AS questionnaire (mean participant age, 20.7 [4.1] years), of which 414 responses came from patients with AR alone compared with 248 with AR+asthma (Table S1 and Figure S1). Regarding absenteeism, AR alone was associated with a

median of 0.1% hours lost (0.0%-6.8%), as was AR+asthma (0.0%-7.4%) (Table S3). For presenteeism, AR alone displayed a median impact of 26.5% academic hours lost (8.0%-55.1%), with similar results observed for AR+asthma (26.7% [9.1%-52.3%]) (Table S3 and Figure). Similar results were observed for AR alone and AR+asthma in analyses stratified by disease control (Table S4).

Our study presents a series of limitations. First, our sample size is limited, particularly in the stratified analyses for AR alone and AR+asthma according to disease control. However, despite the small sample size, our results consistently showed no major differences between AR and AR+asthma. Second, we did not consider differences in the Allergic Rhinitis and Its Impact on Asthma (ARIA) classes [10] or the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) steps owing to limitations in sample size [11]. Third, our sample comprised mostly young adults, and these results may not be generalizable to children. Finally, the WPAI+CIQ:AS is not specific for AR, and we relied on self-reported information on the presence of AR and asthma.

In conclusion, our findings suggest that lack of AR control is associated with a marked impairment in academic performance, mostly due to the effect of AR on presenteeism, further underscoring the substantial burden of uncontrolled AR. Additionally, in this sample of observations of mostly mild asthma (Table S2), we found a similar effect of AR alone and AR+asthma on academic performance. This was underpinned by our stratified analysis based on the level of control, as well as the fact that no major differences were found in the baseline severity of AR between patients with AR alone and AR+asthma (Table S1). This suggests that AR may be the main driver of impaired academic performance in patients with respiratory allergic disease.

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Conflicts of Interest

JB reports personal fees from Cipla, Menarini, Mylan, Novartis, Purina, Sanofi-Aventis, Teva, Uriach, other fees from KYomed-Innov, and other fees from Mask-air-SAS outside the submitted work.

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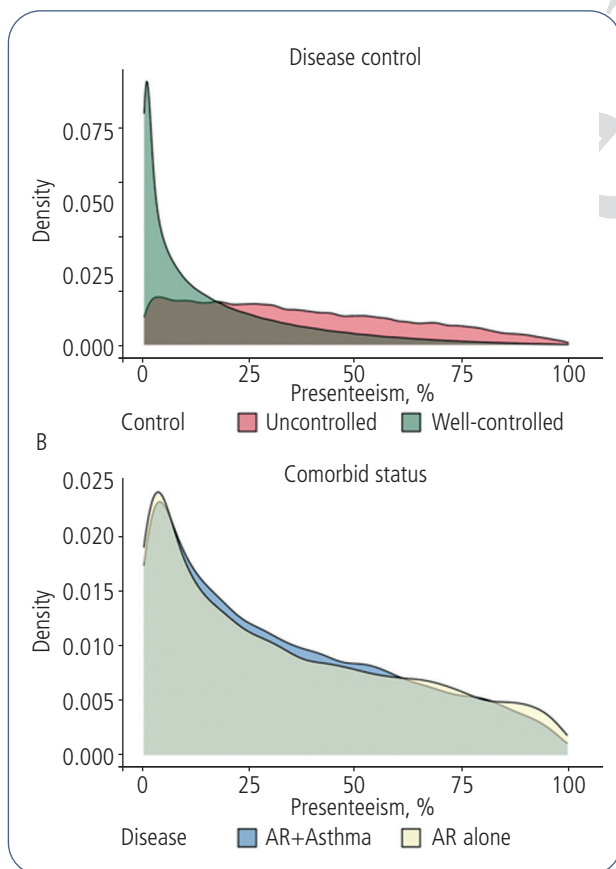


Figure. Presenteeism (academic productivity losses not implying school absenteeism) in allergic rhinitis (AR) according to weekly disease control (A) and comorbid status (B).

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The remaining authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Jean Bousquet

Fraunhofer Institute for Translational Medicine and Pharmacology ITMP, Immunology and Allergology
Berlin, Germany

E-mail: jean.bousquet@itmp-extern.fraunhofer.de; jean.bousquet@orange.fr

 <https://orcid.org/000-0002-4061-4766>