Introduction: Within the Balkan countries, data on the health of ethnic minorities are extremely scarce. This is especially true for the Roma/Gypsies, a relatively reproductively isolated population that is scattered around Europe, but that densely populates the Balkan regions. The Roma/Gypsies belong to the socially disadvantaged and ethnic minority groups that have been historically underrepresented in both anthropological and health research. The aim of the present study is to present general findings regarding the health of Serbian Roma/Gypsy women living in two settlements in Vojvodina, the northern province of Serbia, with a focus placed on investigating health history of the females and their close kin. Further, we will focus on behaviors that increase risk for chronic diseases (e.g., diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular diseases).

Methods: 85 women were interviewed in their homes for this study. Participants were recruited through personal contacts and Roma/Gypsy organizations. Women were eligible if they were Gypsies and married with at least one child. The final sample consisted of 60 Gypsy women residing in Village A and 22 from Village B.

Results: More than half of the women in the sample (53.7%) reported that they do not regularly seek medical help when they are sick; 92.7% did not change their diet when pregnant and 63.4% reported that they smoked during their pregnancies. Five percent of the women consumed alcohol when pregnant, and 96% reported that they were not physically active in pregnancies. The most common complaints were high blood pressure (32.9%), CVD (24.4%), diabetes (20.7%), and an unspecified “nerve condition” (11%).

Conclusion: Given the social status of women, health issues are highly prevalent in this group, which is consistent from our results. Chronic disease is highly rampant due to lack of health care utilization, constant stress, lack of access to healthy foods, increased smoking patterns and alcoholism.

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