

Chronic pain in the school setting: the teachers' point of view

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INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

Children with chronic pain (CP), as any other child, must attend school. Students with CP may experience difficulties in social, academic, and physical functioning¹. Teachers could greatly contribute to children's adjustment and help them to improve their quality of life.

The main **aims** of this study were (1) to explore teachers' responses to students with CP and the problems they encounter when dealing with CP students, and (2) to identify what might help them to support these students. As a **secondary objective**, we also analyzed the relationship between teachers' responses to students in pain, their pain coping strategies and personality traits.



METHODS

Procedure

Primary and secondary schools from Tarragona were invited to participate and teachers' electronic addresses were requested. Once the schools provided them, an email requesting collaboration was sent out to potential participants. Those interested had to answer an online survey.

Measures

Inventory of Parent/Caregiver Responses to the Children's Pain Experience -teachers' version- developed to learn about the teachers' responses when dealing with a student in pain. It is based on the Inventory of Parent/Caregiver Responses to the children's pain experience (IRPEDNA)². Both questionnaires include solicitous (e.g., "I allow a student in pain to do the activities that he /she likes the most"), discouragement (e.g. "I do not give importance because I think he is exaggerating a bit") and coping (e.g. "I recommend him/her to relax and breathe deeply") behaviors.

Personality traits: **Zuckerman-Kuhlman Personality Questionnaire³** (shortened form of 50 items, ZKPQ-50-cc).

Coping strategies: **Chronic Pain Coping Inventory⁴** (42-item).

A list of problems that participating teachers may encounter when dealing with a student with CP:

- Students' absenteeism.
- Difficulties with certain activities.
- Students' demands of being treated differently.
- Lack of knowledge about diseases that may cause CP.
- Lack of knowledge about what is and what means having CP.
- Adjustments for CP students (e.g., adapt certain gym activities or exercises).
- Facilitating the interaction with peers.
- Providing suitable information to other students.
- Combining the needs of a CP student and all others in the class.
- Having meetings with parents.
- Promoting a school policy that facilitates the integration and adaptation of children with CP.

A list of strategies that might help when facing students in CP:

- Having suitable knowledge about what is and what means having CP.
- Having guidelines to deal with a CP student.
- Collaboration and support from healthcare professionals.
- Counting on the collaboration of families.

Data analyses

- Percentages for each problem and strategy were calculated.
- Pearson correlations were also performed to explore the relationships between teachers' responses to students in pain, their pain coping strategies and personality traits.

RESULTS

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Teachers (n=40)	
Age, mean (SD)	41.40 (8.74)
Women	83%
Experience with students with CP	38%
Years of teaching experience, mean (SD)	14.41 (9.4)
Teaching level	
Pre-school level	5%
Pre-school + Primary level	8%
Primary level	22%
Secondary level	65%

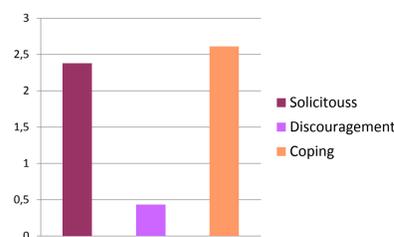


Figure 1. Teachers' responses to students in pain

Table 2. Correlations between teachers' responses to students in pain and teachers' coping strategies and personality traits.

Teachers' responses to students in pain	Solicitous responses	Discouragement responses	Coping and promoting health responses
Teachers' responses to students in pain			
Solicitous responses	1	0.19	0.65 **
Discouragement responses	0.18	1	0.36 *
Coping Strategies			
Guarding	-0.10	0.00	0.02
Resting	0.07	0.24	0.30
Asking for Assistance	0.15	0.11	0.07
Relaxation	0.27	0.18	0.42 **
Task Persistence	0.27	-0.04	0.03
Exercise/Stretch	0.01	0.10	0.10
Seeking Social Support	0.30	0.29	0.37 *
Coping Self-Statements	0.37 *	0.09	0.54 **
Personality traits			
Neuroticism-Anxiety	0.37 *	-0.04	0.26
Impulsive-Sensation Seeking	0.27	0.12	0.17
Activity	0.51	-0.10	-0.08
Sociability	0.14	0.05	0.06
Aggression-Hostility	0.10	-0.02	-0.04

**p<0.01, *p<0.05

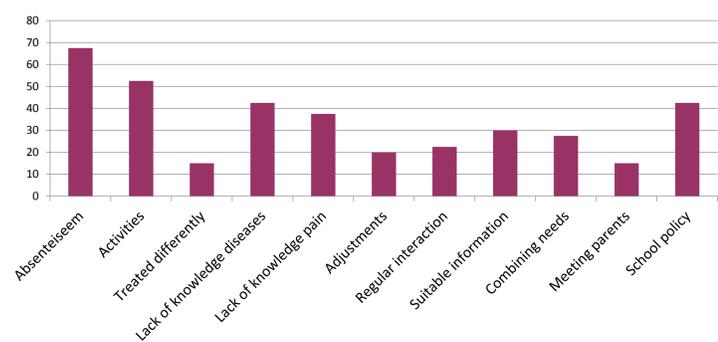


Figure 2. Problems teachers may encounter in front of a student with CP.

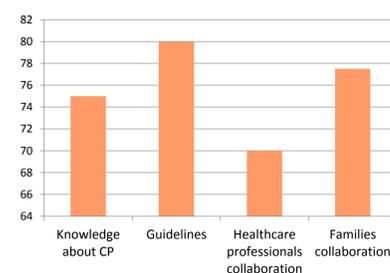


Figure 3. Strategies that teachers think that might help when facing students in CP.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

- This study reports on the difficulties perceived by teachers when dealing with students with CP, the alternative avenues for helping those students as well as on the teachers' usual responses to them.
- This data might be of help to develop guidelines to support teacher's actions when dealing with children with CP.

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