

Managing pain -- a family affair

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Could adult children's strategies for coping with pain come from watching their parents react to and deal with pain? According to Suzyen Kraljevic, from the University Hospital Split in Croatia, and colleagues, a family may have a specific cognitive style of coping with pain. Their work, which looks at the relationship between how parents and their children respond to pain, is published online in Springer's *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*.

It is already recognized that parents' pain behavior is associated with the way their children experience and express pain. Many of our responses are learned by observing and imitating the behavior of others, and this is true for how we express pain and find ways of coping with pain. In this context, family members are more likely to serve as models for pain-related responses than strangers.

Kraljevic and colleagues' work examines the relationship between pain catastrophizing specifically - or the exaggerated negative mental state in response to actual or anticipated pain experience - in parents and their first born child. Using a questionnaire, the researchers assessed the extent to which 285 participants were distressed in response to pain - 100 patients with chronic pain from the Pain Clinic of the University Hospital Split, 85 spouses and 100 adult children. In addition, they measured the level of actual pain experienced by the patients.

"We found that parents' pain catastrophizing scores predicted their adult children's results, irrespective of the level of actual pain experienced by the adult patients. Since during childhood parents serve as a model that

children imitate, it is possible that children use social and communicative tools that they have observed in their parents, to manage their own distress in a similar context. Families may develop a specific cognitive style of dealing with pain," conclude Kraljevic and colleagues.

More information: Kraljevic S et al (2011). Parents' pain catastrophizing is related to pain catastrophizing of their adult children. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*.

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