



Women and pain

Clearinghouse Connector – September 2016

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Introduction

A number of biological and psychosocial factors contribute to women's different experience of pain. Pain is a complex and subjective experience that is often not visible.¹ Women report more pain-related conditions than men and are the majority of those presenting with chronic pain.² Studies show that women have a higher sensitivity to and lower tolerance of pain than men.^{2 3} Women report clinical pain as more intense and with more frequent episodes compared to men as well as having greater sensitivity to painful stimuli in clinical experiments.⁴

Women's overrepresentation in pain conditions could arise from the interaction of biological, psychosocial and sociocultural factors.⁵ Emerging research suggests that women may process pain through different immune cells from men.^{6 7} Psychosocially, women are also more likely to have higher levels of depression and anxiety which is linked to increased risk of pain.⁷

Gendered norms play a role in reporting bias, as learned masculinity encourages stoicism and is associated with higher reported pain thresholds.⁴

Studies confirm that women's pain can be normalised by health professionals and as a result, they are less likely to have their pain taken seriously.^{3 8 9} The absence of diagnosis and a desire to conceal pain can lead to isolation.⁸

Drug trial exclusion, discussed in our previous Connector, has led to a lack of research on effective treatment for women's pain.¹⁰

Overview

[Genders experience pain differently, and women have it more](#) The Conversation, 2015

[Gender and the pain experience](#) Practical Pain Management, 2016

[Sex differences in pain: a brief review of clinical and experimental findings](#) British Journal of Anaesthesia, 2013

[A massive dataset settles it: concerning pain, men and women are different](#) Pain Research Forum, 2012

[Gender role affects experimental pain responses: a systematic review with meta-analysis](#) European Journal of Pain, 2012

[Sex differences in pain and pain inhibition: multiple explanations of a controversial phenomenon](#) Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 2012

Pelvic pain

[An introduction to pelvic pain](#) Pelvic Pain Foundation, 2019 - *added 01/21*

[Constellations of pain: a qualitative study of the complexity of women's endometriosis-related pain](#) *British Journal of Pain*, 2020 - *added 01/21*

[Dysmenorrhea, endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain in adolescents](#) *Journal of Clinical Research in Pediatric Endocrinology*, 2020 - *added 01/21*

[Prevalence and severity of dysmenorrhoea, and management options reported by young Australian women](#) *Australian Family Physician*, 2016

[Localised provoked vestibulodynia \(vulvodynia\): assessment and management](#) Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2015

[The cost of illness and economic burden of endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain in Australia: a national online survey](#) *PLoS One*, 2019 - *added 01/21*

Childbirth

[Pelvic girdle pain in pregnancy](#) *Australian Journal of General Practice*, 2018 - *added 01/21*

[Why labour is such a pain: and how to reduce it](#) *The Conversation*, 2015

[Birth wars: the politics of childbirth](#) *New Statesman*, 2016

[Joint RANZCOG/ANZCA Position statement on the provision of obstetric anaesthesia and analgesia services](#) RANZCOG, 2015

[Pain relief in labour: a qualitative study to determine how to support women to make decisions about pain relief in labour](#) *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 2014

Breast pain

[Breast pain \(mastalgia\)](#) Family Planning NSW, 2018 - *updated 01/21*

[Breast cancer: managing pain](#) Cancer Australia, 2020 – *added 01/21*

[Chronic preoperative pain and psychological robustness predict acute postoperative pain outcomes after surgery for breast cancer](#) *British Journal of Cancer*, 2012

Head and neck pain

[Migraine headaches, menopause and MHT/HRT](#) Australasian Menopause Society, 2019 - *updated 01/21*

[Overview of orofacial pain: epidemiology and gender differences in orofacial pain](#) *Pocket Dentistry*, 2016

Fibromyalgia and pain comorbidities

[Hidden and unexplained: feeling the pain of fibromyalgia](#) *The Conversation*, 2015

[Chronic pain epidemiology: where do lifestyle factors fit in?](#) *British Journal of Pain*, 2013

[The link between chronic pain and depression: which comes first?](#) *The Conversation*, 2016

Medical care

[Acute pain management: scientific evidence. 5th ed. \[Draft\]](#) Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists and Faculty of Pain Medicine, 2019 - *updated 01/21*

[Beating pain](#) *Jean Hailes Magazine*, 2016

[Managing chronic pelvic pain in girls and women](#) *Medicine Today*, 2013 - *Australian study*

Treatment bias

[Why some doctors don't take women's pain seriously](#) *The Conversation*, 2019 - *added 01/21*

[Pain bias: the health inequality rarely discussed](#) *BBC Future*, 2018 - *added 01/21*

[Perspective: equality need not be painful](#) *Nature*, 2016

[How sexist stereotypes mean doctors ignore women's pain](#) *The Independent [U.K.]*, 2016

Women's experiences

[How different cultures experience and talk about pain](#) *The Conversation*, 2015

[What I live with: the silent suffering of one in 10 Australian women with endometriosis](#) *Huffington Post Australia*, 2015

[When a tampon feels like a knife: living with chronic pelvic pain](#) *SBS News*, 2016

[How doctors take women's pain less seriously](#) *The Atlantic*, 2015

International policy development

[Chronic pain in women: neglect, dismissal and discrimination: analysis and policy recommendations](#) [Direct download] Campaign to End Chronic Pain in Women. Overlapping Conditions Alliance [U.S.], 2010

[Impact of chronic overlapping pain conditions on public health and the urgent need for safe and effective treatment: analysis and policy recommendations](#) Chronic Pain Research Alliance [U.S.], 2015

[Quality prescribing for chronic pain: a guide for improvement 2018-2021](#) NHS Scotland, 2018

Australian policy development

[National strategic action plan for pain management](#) Australia. Department of Health, 2019 - *added 01/21*

[Pelvic pain report: the \\$6 billion dollar woman and the \\$600 million girl](#) Pelvic Pain Steering Committee (Australia), 2011

[Statewide persistent pain action plan 2016-2019](#) Queensland Health, 2016

Related websites

[Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia](#) Pelvic pain in women

[Jean Hailes for Women's Health](#) Pelvic pain resources - *added 01/21*

[The Conversation](#) Pain series

[Queensland Health](#) Persistent pain resources

Footnotes

1. Jean Hailes (2016). [Beating pain](#) *Jean Hailes Magazine* 2016(1):13-16. Accessed on 12/08/2016. ↵
2. Mogil, JS (2012). [Sex differences in pain and pain inhibition: multiple explanations of a controversial phenomenon](#). *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 13(12):859-66. Accessed on 12/08/2016.. ↵
3. Bartley EJ, Fillingim RB (2013). [Sex differences in pain: a brief review of clinical and experimental findings](#). *British Journal of Anaesthesia* 111(1):52-8. Accessed on 12/08/2016. ↵
4. Alabas OA, Tashani OA, Tabasam G, Johnson MI (2012). [Gender role affects experimental pain responses: a systematic review with meta-analysis](#). *European Journal of Pain* 16(9):1211-23. Accessed on 12/08/2016.
5. Olson KA (2016). [Gender and the pain experience](#). *Practical Pain Management* 16(2):1-3. Accessed on 12/08/2016.
6. Mogil JS (2016). [Perspective: equality need not be painful](#). *Nature* 535(7611):S7. Accessed on 12/08/2016
7. Della Volpe K (2016). [Sex and gender differences in the pain experience](#). *Practical Pain Management* 16(2):1-2. Accessed on 12/08/2016.
8. Toye F, Seers K, Barker K (2014). A meta-ethnography of patients' experiences of chronic pelvic pain: struggling to construct chronic pelvic pain as 'real' *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 70(12):2713-27. Accessed on 12/08/2016.
9. Woolston C (2016). [Pain: another gender gap](#). *Consumer Health Daily* (Jan. 20). Accessed on 12/08/2016.
10. Evans S (2015). [Genders experience pain differently, and women have it more](#). *The Conversation* (Dec. 10). Accessed on 12/08/2016

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