
CHRONIC PAIN TREATMENT IN YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

OBRAVNAVA MLADIH IN MLADIH ODRASLIH S KRONIČNO BOLEČINO

Zala Kuret

University Rehabilitation Institute, Republic of Slovenia
Linhartova 51, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia
E-mail: zala.kuret@ir-rs.si

BACKGROUND: According to studies, between 11% and 38% of children experience chronic pain, similar numbers can be found in adults (1). Chronic pain in individuals who fall in between the established boundaries of "childhood" and "adulthood", has not been largely documented. This has left gaps in knowledge for this subpopulation where important developmental milestones may not be reached, leading to lifelong individual and societal consequences (2). Vulnerabilities that emerge in late adolescence and early adulthood related to health risk behaviours and poor access to healthcare have significant implications for chronic pain management (3).

AIM: The aim of our study was to review the literature on chronic pain conditions in youth and young adults.

METHODS: We entered search term combinations "chronic pain" and "youth" or "young adults" or "adolescents" into the PubMed database. We included relevant reviews published in English in the past 10 years (from 2013 to 2023).

RESULTS: We only found two reviews (Rosenb, Brown) that met the criteria.

DISCUSSION: According to studies, 5% to 30% of emerging adults experience chronic pain. Chronic pain affects mood, physical functioning, sleep, school or work, and social interactions and activities. In addition to standard assessments of chronic pain severity and disability, we need to highlight developmentally specific areas of relevance to older adolescents and young adults including education, vocation, independence from family, romantic relationships (2). Many different biological, psychological, social and lifestyle factors are associated with chronic pain development in young adults (4). The strongest evidence for associated factors was found for familial chronic pain and experiences of chronic pain in childhood. Anxiety and depression

have a complex relationship with chronic pain, being reported before and after the onset of pain. Emerging adults are open to trying different treatment options, most frequently using analgesics, as well as seeking medical attention. Cannabis is also used in some instances. Health care systems should address more age-relevant topics for this patient population.

CONCLUSIONS

Chronic pain in youth and young adults has not yet been studied sufficiently and more studies are needed to improve understanding of the unique pain experiences during this developmental stage. This will ultimately lead to improved treatment options and better long-term outcomes.

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