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Children's pain and use of pain killers - association with mother's health

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Background: Recurrent headache, abdominal pain and musculo-skeletal pain are common in healthy school children. This may have substantial impact on the child's everyday life and represents a risk for decreased health and wellbeing also in adulthood. Children are dependent on their parents' appraisal of their health complaints in order to get medical attention or other kind of help. The aim with this study was to investigate children from 6-11 years' report of recurrent pain associated with their mothers' report of pain in the child, the child's general health and mother's health and pain conditions.

Methods: A cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey was conducted with 131 6- 11 years old school children and their mothers regarding pain prevalence, intensity, location, frequency and duration as well as medication and socio- economic parameters. Furthermore maternal chronic health complaints and use of medication were registered. The sample was community-based in both urban and rural areas.

Results: 40/131 children reported recurrent pain, and 40/131 mothers reported recurrent pain in their child, but in 25 % of cases with pain, the child and the mother disagreed. Additionally, there was 33 % disagreement about frequency and duration of pain. Children with recurrent pain lived in less advantaged families than children without pain. Mothers with pain themselves were five times more likely to report pain in their child than mothers without pain. Maternal frequent use of over-the-counter analgesics was significantly associated with their child's use of analgesics. There was a non-significant association between the child's use of analgesics and child's report of recurrent pain.

Conclusions: When assessing pain in children it is necessary to take as well the mother as the child's report into account. Maternal health and use of analgesics is necessary to consider when a child is presenting with recurrent pain. Use of analgesics is often not indicated.