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## Headache and recurrent abdominal pains in preschool children

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In a large population-based study, the prevalence of abdominal pains in preschool-age children was found to be high (39.7%) [1]. However in this sample the presence of recurrent abdominal pains (RAP), according to Apley's criteria, was much lower (3.8%–11.8%). It is likely that, using the new, more restricted, criteria of ICHD II [2], the prevalence of RAP will be lower than in previous reports.

Moreover, children with RAP are more likely to experience headache than those without RAP, 27.7% vs. 14.3% at 42 months and 55.4% vs. 37.8% at 81 months, with a statistically significant difference [1].

The study of Ostkirchen et al. [3] examined the prevalence of primary headache and functional abdominal pains in 555 preschool children assessed by a self-administered questionnaire. In this issue the Authors reported that 85.6% of the sample suffered from pain, mainly abdominal pains (33.2%), often associated with headache (48.8%). This high value probably depends on the lack of restricted criteria regarding the pain frequency.

Therefore only 3.6% of this sample suffered from recurrent headache, with a boy/girl ratio of 10 to 1 [3]. Along with this finding, in outpatient headache sufferers under 6 years of age, a greater male gender prevalence and shorter duration of headache attacks were reported [4].

A recent review on childhood RAP epidemiology showed a prevalence ranging from 0.3% to 19% (median 8.4%), higher in females [5]. Another study in children with RAP, defined according the Roma II criteria classification system [6], showed that these criteria could improve diagnosis, study and treatment; however further refinement and clarification for symptom duration and frequency may increase diagnostic agreement [7].

An other issue in Ostkirchen's study is that children experiencing combined headache and abdominal pains reach higher headache intensity levels and both types of pain experiences are relevant for children's everyday life because they contribute to an increase of vulnerability [3].

Recently a study exploring recurrent pain symptoms in school children showed that many young subjects suffer from frequently recurring and co-occurring pain symptoms, indicating an urgent need for early preventive and curative programmes [8]. Further studies are needed to assess the prevalence of headache and abdominal pains in an unselected preschool population and to evaluate longitudinally the persistence of these symptoms and the risk of developing recurrent headache in the following ages.

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