

## Perceived Pain Extent is not associated with Widespread Pressure Pain Sensitivity, Clinical Features, Related-Disability, Anxiety, or Depression in Women with Episodic Migraine

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## **Abstract**

**Objective:** People with migraine present with varying pain extent and an expanded distribution of perceived pain may reflect central sensitization. The relationship between pain extent and clinical features, psychological outcomes, related-disability and pressure pain sensitivity in migraine has been poorly investigated. Our aim was to investigate whether the perceived pain extent, assessed from pain drawings, relates to measures of pressure pain sensitivity, clinical, psychological outcomes, and related-disability in women with episodic migraine. **Methods:** Seventy-two women with episodic migraine completed pain drawings which were subsequently digitized allowing pain extent to be calculated utilising novel software. Pressure pain thresholds (PPT) were assessed bilaterally over the temporalis muscle (trigeminal area), the cervical spine (extra-trigeminal area) and tibialis anterior muscle (distant pain-free area). Clinical features of migraine, migraine related-disability (migraine disability assessment questionnaire, MIDAS), anxiety and depression (Hospital Anxiety-Depression Scale, HADS) were also assessed. Spearman rho correlation coefficients were computed to reveal correlations between pain extent and the remaining outcomes. **Results:** No significant associations were observed between pain extent and PPTs in trigeminal, extra-trigeminal or distant pain-free areas, migraine pain features, or psychological variables including anxiety or depression and migraine related-disability. **Conclusions:** Pain extent within the trigemino-cervical area was not associated with any of the measured clinical outcomes and not related to the degree of pressure pain sensitization in women with episodic migraine. Further research is needed to determine if the presence of expanded pain areas outside of the trigeminal area can play a relevant role in the sensitization processes in migraine.

**Key words:** migraine, pain area, pressure pain, anxiety, depression, sensitization

## Introduction

Migraine is a primary headache disorder with a worldwide prevalence of 5 to 12%<sup>1</sup>. It is well accepted that migraine is associated with a deficient regulation of excitatory-inhibitory balance leading to facilitation of nociceptive gain and sensitization of the trigemino-cervical nucleus caudalis and third-order neurons<sup>2,3</sup>. Several studies have reported that people with migraine may exhibit pressure pain hyperalgesia within the trigemino-cervical area as a clinical manifestation of central nervous system hyper-excitability<sup>4-7</sup>. A recent study has also confirmed the presence of widespread pressure pain hypersensitivity over trigeminal and extra-trigeminal areas in individuals with episodic and chronic migraine suggesting that the sensitization process is present from the onset of the condition<sup>8</sup>.

Pain drawings are used to obtain a graphic representation of pain location and distribution in individuals with musculoskeletal pain, e.g., low back pain<sup>9</sup>. It is accepted that larger pain extent represents a clinical sign of central sensitization<sup>10,11</sup> and enlarged areas of pain have been associated with more severe pain<sup>12</sup> and greater pressure-pain hypersensitivity<sup>13</sup> in individuals with painful knee osteoarthritis. Similarly, larger pain extent has been associated with higher disability and depression in people with chronic whiplash-associated disorders<sup>14</sup>. These results suggest that the pain drawing, and quantification of pain extent, can assist clinicians to identify individuals with facilitated central nociceptive gain or worse clinical features. Nevertheless, these findings have only been evaluated in people suffering with musculoskeletal pain disorders<sup>12-14</sup>.

Since migraine is mainly attributed to a deficient regulation of excitatory-inhibitory balance, the relation between pain extent, central sensitization, and clinical features may be less obvious. Nevertheless, it is relevant to evaluate these associations to better understand the usefulness of the pain drawing for detecting signs of central sensitization in this patient group. Therefore, it would be interesting to determine these potential associations in people with episodic migraine to identify factors for preventing the evolution to the chronic form of the condition. Accordingly, the aims of the current study were to examine: 1) whether pain extent is related to widespread pressure pain

sensitivity in women with episodic migraine; and, 2) to investigate associations between pain extent and clinical variables, psychological variables and related-disability parameters. We hypothesized that larger pain extent is associated with greater widespread pressure pain sensitivity and worse clinical and psychological features in women with episodic migraine.

## **Methods**

### **Participants**

Patients with episodic migraine without aura were recruited from a tertiary university-based hospital from March 2015 to March 2016. Migraine was diagnosed according to the International Classification of Headache Disorders criteria, third edition (ICHD3 beta 2013) down to the third-digit level (code 1.1) by a neurologist with expertise in headache<sup>15</sup>. Migraine features including location, onset of migraine (years), frequency (days/month), duration (hours/attack), and intensity of migraine attacks (numerical pain rating scale, 0-10), headache-family history and medication intake were recorded. A neuro-imaging examination of the head was performed in all patients in order to exclude other disorders. They were excluded if presented any of the following criteria: 1, other primary or secondary headaches, including medication overuse headache according to the ICHD3 beta 2013 criteria<sup>15</sup>; 2, history of neck or head trauma; 3, pregnancy; 4, systemic medical disease, e.g., rheumatoid arthritis, lupus erythematosus; 5, diagnosis of fibromyalgia syndrome; or, 6, positive-response to anesthetic blocks in the cervical spine within the past 6 months. All subjects signed an informed consent form before their inclusion in the study. The local Ethics Committee of Hospital Rey Juan Carlos (HRJ 07/14) approved the study design and the study was conducted according to the Declaration of Helsinki.

The evaluation was conducted when all patients were headache-free, and when at least one week had elapsed since the last migraine attack to avoid migraine related allodynia. Participants were asked to avoid any analgesic or muscle relaxant 24 hours prior to the examination. No change was made to their prophylactic treatment.

## **Pain drawings**

All patients were requested to draw their pain on four different paper body charts of the head: ventral view, dorsal view, and two representing a lateral view (left and right). All body charts were printed on A4 sheets and patients were asked to shade their pain using a pencil. Standard instructions were provided to ensure that patients reported both the pain extent during their migraine attacks, independently from the type and severity of pain.

All the A4 sheets including the body chart and the pain drawing were digitized using a commercially available scanner. Two trained operators then reproduced the pain drawings on the scanned body charts on a blank digital body chart using an image analysis software (Inkscape version 0.48). The reliability of the described procedure has been previously confirmed<sup>16,17</sup>. Finally, pain extent was computed using custom made software presented and evaluated in previous work<sup>17,18</sup>. The software calculates the number of pixels included within each pain drawing. Any shading outside of the body chart borders were not included in the analysis. Pain extent for each patient was reported as the sum of the pixels in the ventral and dorsal views of the head, and expressed as a percentage of total dorsal and ventral body chart area (i.e. 507778 pixels, frontal: 252617 pixels, dorsal: 255166 pixels). Pain frequency maps were generated for the four different body charts of the head to illustrate where pain was most frequently perceived by the patients. Pain frequency maps were obtained by overlying all of the pain drawings performed on the same body chart. A colour scale was applied to highlight the percentage of patients that reported pain in a specific region.

## **Pressure Pain Thresholds (PPT)**

The PPT, i.e., the amount of pressure where a sensation of pressure first changes to pain, was recorded with an electronic algometer (Somedic AB®, Farsta, Sweden). Pressure was applied using a 1cm<sup>2</sup> probe at a rate of approximately 30kPa/s. Participants were instructed to press the “stop-button” of the algometer as soon as the pressure resulted in the first sensation of pain. They were trained with a first trial over the wrist extensor muscles of their right forearm. PPT was then

assessed bilaterally over the temporalis muscle (trigeminal area), C5/C6 zygapophyseal joint (extra-trigeminal area) and the tibialis anterior muscle (pain-free distant site). A mean PPT widespread score was obtained from the mean of the 3 body regions. The order of assessment was randomized between participants. A 30 s resting period was allowed between each trial (within and between body regions) to prevent over sensitization<sup>19</sup>. The mean of three trials on each point was calculated and used for the analysis. Since no side-to-side differences in PPTs were found, the mean of both sides on each point was used for the correlation analysis with pain extent. The reliability of algometry following this procedure is high<sup>20</sup>.

### **Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS)**

The HADS was used to determine the presence of anxiety and depressive symptoms. This questionnaire consists of 7-items scored on a 4-points scale ranging from 0 to 3 points to assess anxiety (HADS-A) and other 7-items for depressive (HADS-D) symptoms<sup>21</sup>. Each subscale ranges from 0 to 21 points where higher scores represent higher levels of anxiety or depression symptoms<sup>21</sup>. This questionnaire is considered reliable and valid for assessing anxiety (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.83) and depression (Cronbach's  $\alpha$ : 0.82) separately<sup>22</sup>. In headache patients, the HADS has shown good internal consistency<sup>23</sup>.

### **State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)**

The STAI is a 40-item scale assessing separate dimensions of state anxiety (items 1-20, STAI-S) and trait anxiety (items 21-40, STAI-T)<sup>24</sup>. The STAI-S assesses relatively enduring symptoms of anxiety. Participants use a 4-point response scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much”, to indicate the extent to which they experience each particular emotion. The STAI-T scale measures a stable propensity to experience anxiety, and tendencies of the subject to perceive stressful situations as threatening. It consists of 20 statements requiring individuals to rate how they generally feel on a 4-point scale. In both scales, total score ranges from 0 to 60 points where higher scores indicate greater state or trait anxiety levels. Both subscales have shown high internal consistency and test-retest reliability<sup>25</sup>.

## **Migraine-related disability (MIDAS)**

The Migraine Disability Assessment Scale (MIDAS) questionnaire was used to assess the related-disability in daily activities (work or school, family and social) caused by migraine<sup>26</sup>. This questionnaire consists of five questions related to days of partial or total loss within the last three months with respect to three main activities: 1, paid work or school; 2, household chores; 3, family, social and leisure activities. The questions ask about the number of days of missed activity or days in which productivity was reduced by at least half due to migraine. The final score corresponds to the sum of missed days for these three activities<sup>27</sup>.

## **Sample size calculation**

The sample size was calculated using Ene 3.0 software (Autonomic University of Barcelona, Spain) and based on detecting significant moderate correlations ( $r=0.4$ )<sup>12,14</sup> between the variables with an alpha level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05, and a desired power ( $\beta$ ) of 95%. This generated a sample size of 71 participants.

## **Statistical analysis**

The Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test revealed that the distribution of data for pain extent and 6 of the clinical parameters (years with migraine, migraine intensity, migraine frequency, migraine duration, HADS-A, MIDAS) significantly deviated from normality. Therefore, non-parametric tests were used in the correlational analysis. Spearman's rho rank-order correlation coefficients ( $r_s$ ) were used to reveal possible associations between pain extent and self-rated outcomes, i.e., clinical migraine pain features, anxiety, depression, related-disability, and widespread pressure pain sensitivity. Correlations were considered weak when  $r<0.3$ ; moderate when  $0.3<r<0.7$ , and strong when  $r>0.7$ <sup>28</sup>. A multivariate regression model including those variables significantly associated with pain extent was conducted to assess the variables that contributed significantly to the variance in the dependent variable i.e., pain extent. Statistical analysis was performed using R version 3.2.2. Significance was set to  $\alpha=0.05$  and the Bonferroni correction was applied ( $\alpha$ -adjusted=0.0036) to account for multiple testing<sup>29</sup>.

## Results

From 105 eligible subjects with migraine who accepted to participate, 33 were excluded for the following reasons: co-morbid headache (n=20); previous head/neck trauma (n=7); or pregnancy (n=6). Finally, a total of 72 patients with migraine were included. **Table 1** summarizes clinical and PPT data of the entire sample. Pain extent was  $13.4 \pm 9.4\%$  across the entire group of women with migraine. Pain frequency maps for the entire sample are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

The mean time elapsed from the last migraine attack in the current patient sample was 10 days (95%CI 9.2, 10.8). All patients were taking prophylactic medication intake, i.e., amitriptyline, on a regular basis. Correlations between the area of pain, clinical symptoms and related-disability are reported in **Table 1**. No significant associations were observed between pain extent and clinical features, psychological variables including anxiety (HADS-A) or depressive (HADS-D) symptoms or with anxiety trait (STAI-T) or anxiety state (STAI-S) levels. Finally, no significant associations were found between pain extent and PPT scores in either trigeminal, extra-trigeminal, distant pain-free areas or mean PPT score (**Table 1**).

## Discussion

The degree of pain extent was not associated with clinical, psychological or disability variables nor with widespread pressure pain sensitivity in women with episodic migraine rejecting the initial hypothesis of the study.

Although it is accepted that people with migraine exhibit pain in the trigeminal area, mostly concentrated on the orbicular and temporalis areas, the evaluation of pain drawings in people with migraine is scarce. In fact, only two studies have evaluated the location of pain during migraine attacks in adults<sup>30</sup> and children<sup>31</sup> with migraine. The first showed that, from a total sample of 1283 patients with migraine, around 60%-65% reported pain in the fronto-orbital and temporal areas, whereas occipital and neck pain were present in almost 40% of the sample<sup>30</sup>. The second study observed that 66% of 200 children with migraine reported frontal pain, but the presence of occipital



pain was only 12%<sup>31</sup>. However, neither study included an actual evaluation of pain drawings but rather documented pain location based on questions asked to the patients<sup>30,31</sup>. The pain frequency maps generated from the current study, further supports the observations above since 60% of the patients exhibited pain in the fronto-orbital and/or temporalis areas during their migraine pain attacks. Further, the pain frequency maps also revealed that around 30% of the patient's exhibit pain in the occipital and neck area. Thus, both the current and previous findings confirm the high prevalence of concomitant neck pain in migraine sufferers<sup>32</sup>.

Larger pain extent and widespread pressure hypersensitivity have been associated with stronger sensitization<sup>8,10,11</sup>; however, in the current study we did not observe any association between pain extent in the trigemino-cervical area and widespread pressure sensitivity. This is in contrast with the results observed in other painful conditions such as knee osteoarthritis where larger pain extent was associated with higher pressure hypersensitivity<sup>13</sup>. Similarly, the present study did not find associations between pain extent and clinical, psychological and related-disability outcomes in our sample of women with episodic migraine which is in disagreement with previous findings reported for other pain conditions, e.g. knee osteoarthritis<sup>12</sup> or chronic whiplash-associated disorders<sup>14</sup>. Our results support the findings of Kelman et al<sup>30</sup> which showed that headache location was not correlated with lifetime duration of migraine, intensity, time to peak of headache, recurrence frequency, and time to recurrence.

One possible explanation for the discrepancy between the current results and those observed in people with whiplash associated disorders or osteoarthritis, could be related to the fact that both osteoarthritis and whiplash are musculoskeletal disorders whereas migraine is attributed to deficient regulation of excitatory-inhibitory balance. Therefore, the potential relationship between pain extent, clinical, psychological and sensitization outcomes may be less clear. It is also possible that the presence of more widespread symptoms extending beyond the head and neck area<sup>33</sup> is more related to sensitization outcomes. Finally, it is also plausible that the inclusion of episodic, not chronic, migraine explains the lack of associations. In fact, all patients in our sample were taking

prophylactic treatment on a regular basis, which could have influenced the results. Nevertheless, the lack of association between pain extent and psychological outcomes, including anxiety and depression, confirms that expanded pain drawings are not always associated with psychological state<sup>34</sup>.

This is the first study utilizing a novel software for extracting pain extent from pain drawings in a sample of women with migraine. This is a strength of the study since pain extent could be analyzed without any subjective influence from an operator and thus the software used to estimate pain extent eliminates estimation errors. However, we should recognize that the pain drawings were first drawn on paper body charts, and later scanned. It would be relevant to determine if pain drawings using electronics devices, e.g., on a tablet, instead of paper body charts would lead similar results. In addition, some potential methodological considerations should be mentioned. First, we collected data from a sample of women with episodic migraine; therefore current results should not be extrapolated to chronic migraine or to men. It would be interesting to determine if any association is observed in people with chronic migraine and this should be explored in future studies. Second, although the reliability of the assessment method has been shown to be high in people with musculoskeletal pain<sup>18</sup>, we did not evaluate the reliability of pain location over time in our sample of patients with migraine. This might be relevant in individuals with migraine since pain drawings were obtained when patients were headache-free and when at least one week had elapsed since the last migraine attack and, therefore, a potential recall of bias can be present. Nevertheless, since patients in our sample suffered from migraine for more than 15 years, this seems unlikely. It would be relevant to determine longitudinal changes in pain extent in people with migraine and to see if differences are observed between the episodic and chronic forms of the condition. Third, we collected static outcomes of sensitization and only from one stimuli, pressure thresholds. We do not know if pain extent is associated with other manifestations of sensitization such as wind-up, spatial or temporal summation, or conditioned pain modulation. Finally, we did not ask the participants to report pain in other locations of their body and perhaps

widespread pain across the entire body is associated with psychological factors or sensitization in migraine sufferers.

## **Conclusions**

This study utilised a reliable procedure to quantify pain extent in women with migraine. Pain extent within the trigemino-cervical area did not correlate with the degree of sensitization or any other clinical features in women with episodic migraine. Further research is needed to determine if the presence of expanded pain areas outside of the trigeminal-cervical area can play a relevant role in the sensitization processes in migraine.

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

### **Legend of Figure**

**Figure 1:** Pain frequency maps generated by superimposing the pain drawings of all women with episodic migraine (n=72). The colour bar represents the frequency of coloured areas. Dark red indicates the most frequently reported area of pain

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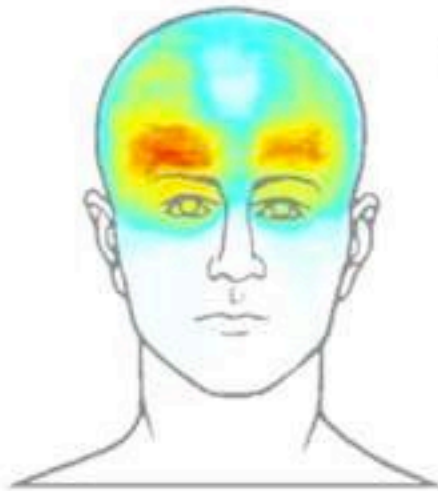
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**Table 1:** Spearman's rho coefficients between pain extent computed using pain drawings and clinical variables and psychological variables and pressure pain sensitivity in women with migraine (n=72).

		Mean (95%CI)	rho value	P value
Age (years)		42 (39-45)	-.046	.706
History of migraine (years)		19.6 (16.3-22.8)	-.099	.412
Pain extent (percentage)		13.4 (11.1-15.6)	-----	-----
Related-disability (MIDAS)		44.1 (27.4-60.8)	.004	.977
Clinical Features	Migraine intensity (NPRS, 0-10)	8.1 (7.7-8.6)	-.026	.832
	Migraine duration (hours/attack)	23.7 (18.9-28.1)	-.110	.361
	Migraine frequency (days/month)	9.6 (8.1-11.1)	-.001	.990
Psychological variables	HADS-A (0-21)	12.3 (11.7-12.8)	-.076	.528
	HADS-D (0-21)	10.4 (9.7-11.1)	.045	.710
	STAI-trait (0-60)	25.3 (23.7-26.9)	.087	.467
	STAI-state (0-60)	21.8 (20.5-22.5)	.045	.710
PPT (kPa)	Temporalis muscle	161.5 (145.7-177.3)	.111	.354
	C5-C6 zygapophyseal joint	135.1 (124.7-145.6)	.069	.566
	Tibialis anterior muscle	333.2 (303.5-362.9)	.141	.238
	Widespread PPT mean value	210.5 (194.1-226.9)	.122	.309

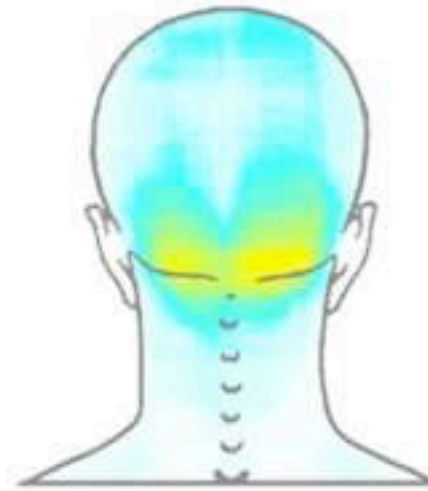
NPRS: Numerical Pain Rate Scale; MIDAS: Migraine Disability Assessment Scale;  
PPT: Pressure Pain Threshold; HADS-A: Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale - Anxiety Subscale; HADS-D: Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale - Depression Subscale; STAI: State-Trait Anxiety Inventory; r: Pearson correlation test





Perc.Subjts	H.Subjts	H.Pixel
60%	43	907
54%	39	7277
47%	30	12613
40%	29	14049
35%	25	22081
28%	20	19378
21%	15	18452
15%	11	19276
8%	6	19770
1%	1	26684

**Frontal view**



Perc.Subjts	H.Subjts	H.Pixel
44%	32	2840
40%	29	5045
36%	26	10776
31%	22	7579
26%	19	15349
21%	15	20749
17%	12	59138
11%	8	41699
7%	5	65996
1%	1	17253

**Dorsal view**



Perc.Subjts	H.Subjts	H.Pixel
61%	44	1682
56%	40	6416
49%	35	9778
42%	30	11676
35%	25	9252
28%	21	22859
22%	16	42191
15%	11	57171
8%	6	55778
1%	1	46575

**Right side view**



Perc.Subjts	H.Subjts	H.Pixel
51%	37	2084
46%	33	6676
39%	29	6416
35%	25	12041
29%	21	12180
24%	17	16414
18%	13	36692
13%	9	58758
7%	5	78272
1%	1	29344

**Left side view**