

Research question: What are contributing factors that impact how young women experience physical pain?

Over the course of this summer, I was drawn to the idea of pain and why humans have different perceptions of the feeling. My interest for the study of pain stemmed from my attraction to psychology and the human brain. When I embarked on my highschool journey, I found myself gravitating more towards science and understanding the nature of things instead of just accepting facts as they were told. Before starting OppNet SSRP, I wasn't aware of how extensive the topic of pain could be. I hadn't considered the different factors it entailed, such as the type of pain in question. Did I want to take the traditional physical route, or focus more on the emotional aspect of pain, which is often overlooked in mainstream medicine? I hadn't even considered how factors like the environment, age, and gender could all affect the answer to my question. Following much revision and consideration, I decided to settle on physical trauma, and direct my focus towards women - specifically young adults - and examine the contributing factors that cause them to experience pain differently.

From all the research I conducted, I discovered that the answer to my question is pretty inconclusive, and it doesn't have a definite answer. However, I did come across some interesting findings that deserve an honorable mention. For starters, young men and women are conditioned to believe by societal norms that women are more susceptible to enduring pain and should be more sensitive than men. This belief affects the way both genders are treated in society in general, including the medical field, which essentially plays into how endurance is a psychological aspect because it is based on what you are taught to believe, and the gender bias that exists. Because women are treated the way they are treated, they have inherently picked up various coping mechanisms for pain that are heavily tied into psychology. The studies I found went into great detail on how women who catastrophize, or in other words, exaggerate the feelings of pain, will end up feeling pain more deeply than those who pay less mind to their inconvenience. Ultimately, the most important takeaway I got from my research was that your past experiences, your physical state, and your psychological state all have a toll in the way that women perceive pain, and their coping mechanisms are crucial to how they not only handle their current pain, but can influence how you deal with future discomforts.

The fact that our state of mind has such a tremendous impact on pain perception and tolerance really amazes me because it is something that we have a hand in moderating. I strongly believe that this fact should become more mainstream and paid more attention to, because if we are able to teach women how to help alleviate their pain by simply having more control over their thoughts, it could save a lot of women from suffering unnecessarily. This would help spread awareness for mental health and the vast importance of being able to be in touch with your senses and being body conscious. I think it would be useful for women to distinguish the difference between chronic pain that absolutely demands medication or even doctor vs. a minor trauma that doesn't deserve all the attention that it may be given. I also think it will be valuable to take the time and learn how men can use psychology to handle their pain, since talking about pain is unfortunately such a taboo topic amongst men. With this knowledge, I think we can strengthen women and help them understand how to be more in touch with their bodies, leading them to live better lives and not succumb to pain they can overcome. Just imagine how unstoppable females would be knowing nothing can hold them back!