

The negative effect of period pain is greater than you think

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A new study published in the journal *Pain* is the first to look at the effect of period pain on cognitive performance.

(Medical Xpress)—Menstrual pain causes regular suffering for many women, and its effects are often overlooked and poorly understood, according to pain psychologists.

Period pain (dysmenorrhea) is a very common painful condition that affects more than 40 per cent of women on a regular basis. Symptoms can include pain, nausea, and cramping, and is reported as severe in up

to 15 per cent of sufferers.

Published in the journal *Pain*, a new study is the first to look at the effects of pain during the menstrual cycle on cognitive performance. It builds on previous work into headaches conducted by [psychologists](#) in our Centre for Pain Research.

Lead author, Dr Ed Keogh from the Department of Psychology, explained: "Pain is an extremely common experience and can have a disruptive effect on all our daily lives. Our research looked at how common everyday pain, experienced by many women each month, affects their ability to perform a range of [complex tasks](#). This shows that the effects of pain go beyond the sensory experience, affecting what we think and feel."

As part of the study, the researchers asked 52 adult participants to complete computer-based tasks that examined different aspects of [attention](#), whilst also experiencing period pain. The tasks measured [selective attention](#) (being able to choose between competing targets), [attention span](#) (monitoring and updating information), and dividing and switching attention between two tasks.

Surprisingly, rather than finding a specific effect of pain on these tasks, period pain had a more general effect, dampening overall performance.

The key implication from this research is that it highlights the need to develop better ways of measuring the effects of pain on everyday lives. This research suggests we should focus on developing strategies to help people remove barriers to performance, and even consider ways of repairing attention when exposed to frequent pain.

Dr Keogh, who will appear on tomorrow night's C4 programme 'Embarrassing Bodies' discussing his research into the gender differences

around pain and coping strategies, added: "We know that the impact of pain can be widespread. The more we understand about how people experience [pain](#), the better mechanisms we can put in place to help people cope."

More information: Keogh, E., Cavill, R., Moore, D.J. and Eccleston, C., 2014. "The effects of menstrual-related pain on attentional interference." *Pain*, 155 (4), pp. 821-827.

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