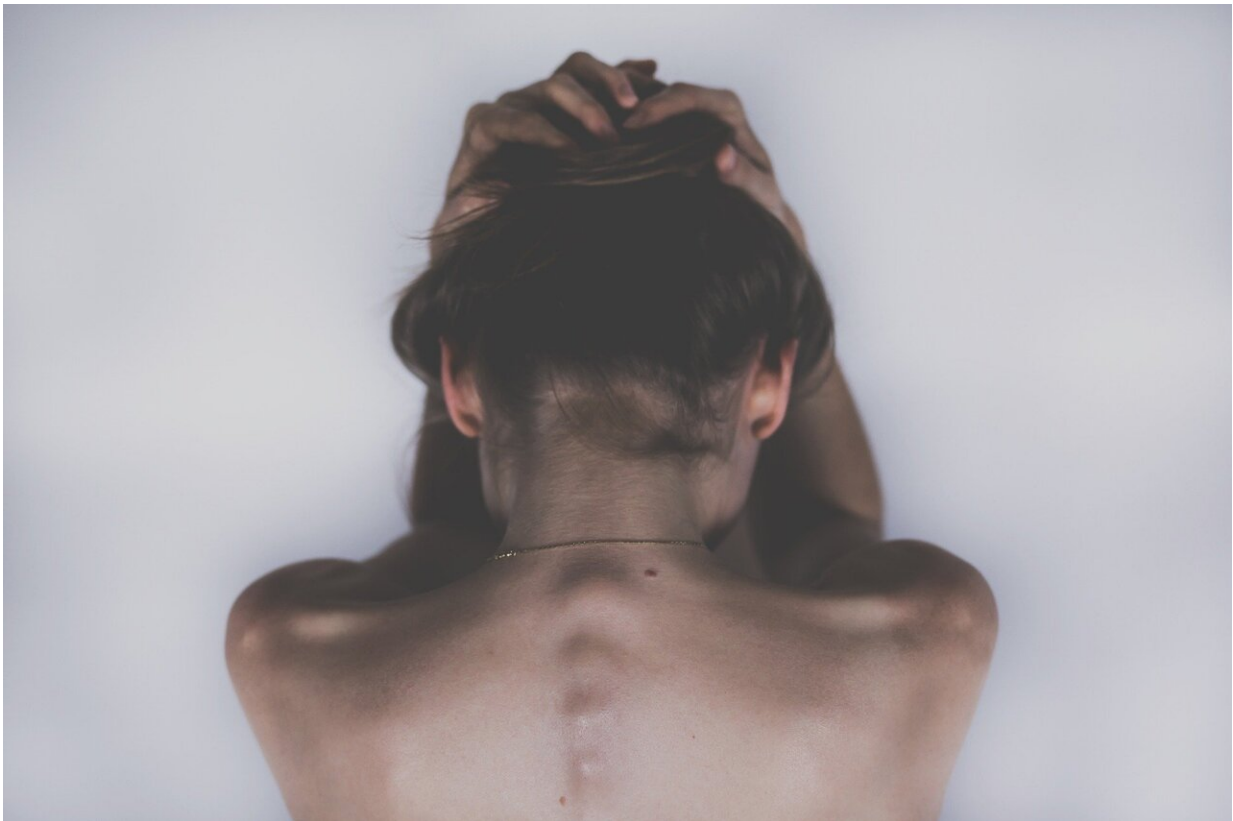


The conditions of 70% of people with chronic pain have worsened during the pandemic

March 2 2021



Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

The pandemic has impacted significantly on people who suffer chronic pain. A study performed by the eHealth Lab, a research group affiliated with the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Universitat Oberta de

Catalunya's eHealth Center, has shown that 70% of the people with chronic pain have seen their condition worsen in terms of severity, frequency of episodes and interference in their daily activities.

A total of 502 patients took part in the study; 88% were women aged between 30 and 59, with long-duration chronic [pain](#) (mean duration, seven years). Most participants (87.6%) had pain in more than one point; the most frequent locations were the abdomen, lower back and neck. The participants answered online surveys, designed in accordance with the IMMPACT (Initiative on Methods, Measurement, and Pain Assessment in Clinical Trials) methodology, and the CPGQ (Chronic Pain Grade Questionnaire) was used to compare changes in the pain perceived by the patients since lockdown began.

The pandemic worsens pain

The results showed that job insecurity, worries about the future, the number of people living in the same dwelling, having someone close who has died of COVID-19, or fear of becoming infected with the virus may be related with a worsening of the pain.

The study also shows that the pandemic has favored the emergence of new pain triggers. While stress and weather changes were the most frequently mentioned triggers before the pandemic, during lockdown a large number of participants have mentioned worrying about the future, sleep problems, insecurity, negative thoughts, sadness, loneliness, insufficient physical activity and fear of contagion as triggers.

New ways of coping with pain

The pandemic has also changed how a significant proportion of patients manage their pain. More than half (54.5%) have changed how they cope

with it: "The study has shown that since the state of emergency began, more than half of the patients have used rest to manage their pain, and a similar percentage have increased the consumption of medication. Both could have counterproductive effects," explained Rubén Nieto, professor and researcher at the UOC's eHealth Lab. However, with the pandemic, people have also started turning to a new positive way to combat pain. Indeed, 48.2% have included stretching exercises as a new tool for dispelling pain.

ICTs, an opportunity for the future

"When there is a chronic pain problem, it is important that people be able to learn to live with it, focusing on achieving their life goals, with or without pain. It is difficult to eliminate the pain altogether, but it is possible to learn to cope with it and live with it. Biopsychosocial interventions may be useful, in which holistic approaches to pain management are used," explained Rubén Nieto, who is a specialist in understanding, assessing and treating pain problems from a multidimensional viewpoint.

Unfortunately, most people do not have access to these interventions, as few centers offer this type of treatment, and [health professionals](#) receive little specific training in pain management, according to Nieto. However, ICTs are emerging as a useful tool for taking this type of treatment to chronic pain patients: "ICTs provide an opportunity for combating pain and improving well-being, since they can facilitate access to evidence-based interventions at an affordable cost. And they can increase personal autonomy and empowerment," explained Nieto, who focuses part of his research on applying new technologies to health problems. "We need to learn from the experience gained from the pandemic in the use of ICTs in health," he continued. "The possibilities are limitless, from the classic teleconsultation to solutions based on artificial intelligence. But first we must plan and test their use."

Second part of the study

Led by the psychologist and researcher Rubén Nieto, the following people have also taken part in this study: Beatriz Sora, also a researcher for the eHealth Lab research group and professor at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili's (URV) Psychology Department; the clinical psychologist Rebeca Pardo, professor of Psychology at the European University of Madrid's and adjunct professor at the Autonomous University of Madrid; and Juan Vicente Luciano Devis and Albert Feliu Soler, who are researchers at the Sant Joan de Déu Research Institute and professionals at the Sant Joan de Déu Health Park.

In order to improve understanding of the situation of people with chronic pain within the context of the pandemic, the researchers have planned a second part of the study in which in-depth interviews will be performed with people suffering from [chronic pain](#) in order to gain first-hand knowledge of their situation. Rubén Nieto's team is looking for people who would like to take part. If you are interested, you can contact him by email at rnietol@uoc.edu.

More information: Rubén Nieto et al. Impact of COVID-19 Lockdown Measures on Spanish People with Chronic Pain: An Online Study Survey, *Journal of Clinical Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/jcm9113558](https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm9113558)

Provided by Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Citation: The conditions of 70% of people with chronic pain have worsened during the pandemic (2021, March 2) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-conditions-people-chronic-pain-worsened.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.