

Grant title: “One and the same?”: An in-depth investigation into the complexities of pain experiences of children and young people with inflammatory and non-inflammatory conditions

Original award holders: Dr Lis Cordingley, Dr Rebecca Lee, Prof Wendy Thomson

The award holders have changed during the course of the PhD due to retirements. The current holders include Dr Rebecca Lee, Dr Daniela Ghio, Prof Sarah Peters, Dr Janet McDonagh (Honorary contract), and Dr Lis Cordingley (Honorary contract).

This report describes the previous 12 months progress of the three-year studentship (award duration - 01/10/2020 to 01/10/2023).

Background and aims of project:

Musculoskeletal pain affects approximately 40% of children and young people, although causes vary. There is evidence suggesting that pain is managed differently depending upon whether children and young people are believed to have an inflammatory or non-inflammatory musculoskeletal condition. Those with inflammatory conditions may be more likely to receive pharmacologically focused treatment whilst those with non-inflammatory conditions are predominantly provided with psychological management techniques. Currently, however, rationale for the different approaches is unclear. Little is known about the similarities and differences of pain experiences between these groups and whether the apparent differences in approaches to pain management is warranted or not.

This PhD will explore and characterise chronic pain experiences in children and young people with musculoskeletal conditions with different underlying pathologies/diagnoses and will begin to identify their management pathways.

Progress to date:

The student has achieved all postgraduate research progression milestone provided by the University of Manchester. Examples of the progress made are provided below:

1. The student submitted her scoping review to the Journal of Pediatric Psychology in February 2023.

2. The student is finalising two original research articles from an online questionnaire that explored paediatric rheumatology healthcare professionals' pain beliefs, and beliefs about pain assessment and management priorities. The student plans to submit these to the Journal of Pain, and Rheumatology, in May 2023 and June 2023.
3. Recruitment is ongoing with four UK NHS centres for two research studies detailed below. Unexpected and unprecedented delays outside the of the team's control have led to delays in recruitment. For example, due to pressures on the NHS (including staff shortages) and delays in the R&D approval process (for example, pre-COVID studies being prioritised). The student has been committed to implementing strategies to address this, such as submitting an amendment to NHS ethics to recruit an additional community sample of children/young people (i.e. through social media and charities), and modifying original analysis plans to fit within the PhD timeline.
 - i. Study 1 - An online pain questionnaire exploring broad pain influences (e.g., pain beliefs, pain coping) and a weekly pain diary. The diary assesses pain characteristics, such as pain intensity, location, interference, and emotion.
 - ii. Study 2 - Interviews to explore topics from the pain questionnaire/pain diary in more depth, including beliefs about pain, pain characteristics, and experiences with healthcare professionals.
4. The student has successfully presented posters at four national and international conferences: The International Symposium of Pediatric Pain, 24-27 March 2022 (online), The Division of Health Psychology Conference, 28-29 June 2022 (Bristol, UK), The European Health Psychology Society conference, 23-27 August 2022 (Bratislava, Slovakia), and The International Association for the Study of Pain conference, 19-23 September 2022 (Toronto, Canada).
5. The student was successfully accepted as a committee member for two prestigious organisations in August 2022 and September 2022. These include being a Psychology Postgraduate Affairs (PsyPAG) North-West Representative within the British Psychological Society (BPS) and as a Pain in Child Health (PICH) Trainee Representative which is an international group of world-leading pain researchers and clinicians.
6. The student attended Sheffield Children's Hospital and Bath Centre for Pain Services in November 2022 and December 2022 to present her research plans and shadow rheumatology and pain clinics. The student has since presented her research plans in a number of other online and in-person meetings within the department, at clinical research meetings with healthcare professionals at the University of Manchester, Manchester Children's Hospital and Great North Children's Hospital, and during a workshop with the Barbara Ansell Network for Adolescent Rheumatology.