**The threat from inside:**

**Fear and interoception in children and adolescents with chronic pain**

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Chronic pain in children and adolescents constitute a serious problem with prevalence rates of five percent. Recent studies (RCTs, meta-analyses) show that psychological interventions within an interdisciplinary treatment approach can lead to significant and sustainable reductions in pain intensity and pain-related disability. However, these studies also reveal that increased emotional distress, such as increased fear of pain, can interfere with positive treatment outcome. This type of fear therefore warrants appropriate psychological treatment.

A specific form of this fear, probably acquired via interoceptive fear conditioning, is the fear of interoceptive sensations. Results from experimental studies provide new insights for the conception of therapeutic interventions such as interoceptive exposure to decrease this fear. On the other hand, the findings also raise new questions such as why adolescents with chronic pain perceive “harmless” sensations as painful. The interoceptive predictive coding model offers one way to interpret these findings (Hechler, Endres, Thorwart, 2016).

Core topics of the presentation comprise: first, the presentation of recent findings on the effectiveness and limits of psychological interventions for children and adolescents with chronic pain and increased emotional distress. Second, to characterize the construct of fear of interoceptive sensations in children with chronic pain within experimental studies. Third, to elucidate potential therapeutic interventions to decrease this type of fear and fourth, to exemplarily discuss the interoceptive predictive coding model to account for the perception of “harmless” sensations as painful in adolescents with chronic pain.

Reference

*Hechler T, Endres D and Thorwart A (2016) Why Harmless Sensations Might Hurt in Individuals with Chronic Pain: About Heightened Prediction and Perception of Pain in the Mind. Front. Psychol. 7:1638. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01638.*