CORRESPONDENCE

Risk Factors for Headache in Children

by Dipl.-Psych. Jennifer Gaßmann, Dr. rer. nat. Nuria Vath, Hester van Gessel
MSc, Dipl.-Psych. Prof. Dr. phil. Birgit Kröner-Herwig in volume 31–32/2009

School as a Risk Factor

Specialists in pediatric and adolescent medicine have for many years reported symptoms of psychological stress in a high proportion of school children. Headache is certainly an important indicator in this setting. The entire area of school as an important risk factor has, however, been neglected in the article by Gaßmann et al. It is well known that all demands made on a child within the family, during leisure activities, and especially in school constitute specific stimuli for a child's bodies. These stimuli are an active form of adjustment on the child's part to environmental influences, especially demands imposed by lessons/school subjects and by the material-hygienic conditions at school. Headache can be an indicator of stress experienced by a child as a result of school. It has been shown that students in the lower forms (1st to 4th year), who receive lessons primarily over the lunch period, have reported headaches far more often and showed unfavorable physiological test results far more often than children whose schooling fell into the morning hours (1). For this reason, the omission of school—which takes up a vast amount of important time in children's everyday lives—from a research project involving children, adolescents, and headache, is a clear shortcoming of this article.

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In Reply:

We agree unreservedly and wholeheartedly with Dr Ockel's arguments. School is indeed an extremely relevant problem area, which can result in headaches in children and adolescents and has often been dealt with in the literature (1, 2). Scientific articles, however, whose objective is to be published, are always faced with the necessity of doing justice to the manuscript submission standards of the relevant journal, where space is often a limiting factor.

Independently of this dilemma, which is well known to many authors, something that must be borne in mind for the statistical evaluation of study data are the selec-

tion and application of adequate and appropriate methods, whose requirements may impose further restrictions on authors. By way of a conclusion, we wish to point out that a manuscript entitled "Gender-specific predictor analyses for the occurrence of recurrent headaches in German schoolchildren" (Gaßmann J, van Gessel H, Barke A, Kröner-Herwig B) was submitted for review to the journal "Cephalalgia" on 18 August 2009. In that article, we analyzed variables of the area "school" as mentioned. We showed that the presence of "learning difficulties" and "dysfunctional coping strategies" increases the probability in girls of developing recurrent headaches. In this context, the relevance of variables that concern school was confirmed at least in part in the described epidemiological longitudinal study.

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Conflict of interest statement

The authors of both contributions declare that no conflict of interest exists according to the guidelines of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors.