Adolescents’ Experience of Pain: A Focus Group Study in Sweden

Background
The biopsychosocial model of pain specifies that pain consists of nociception, perception, affect, and behavioral and environmental factors. Pain among adolescents is common; approximately 1 in 3 adolescent experiences chronic pain, and 1 in 10 experience severe chronic pain. The purpose of this study was to investigate experiences of pain among students at upper secondary schools (adolescents aged 16–19 years) in Sweden.

Methods
Focus group (n = 9) interviews with 41 adolescents aged 16-19 were conducted in southern Sweden in 2021. The interviews were analyzed by qualitative content analysis.

Results
The analysis revealed four categories encompassing how pain expresses itself:
1) a warning bell – the body’s way of saying that something is wrong;
2) heartache – a sign of humanity;
3) school- and work-related pain;
4) interpersonal physical and emotional pain;
and four categories describing ways in which these adolescents dealt with pain:
1) turn your attention elsewhere;
2) ask for help from others;
3) ‘bite the bullet’ and endure the pain;
4) use painkillers or complementary treatments.

Conclusion
Findings from this study showed that pain was described by the adolescents both as mental pain and as physical pain, and the adolescents expressed that mental pain could be even as hard as physical pain. Discussion focuses on how the findings link with the role of the school nurse who have a broad knowledge of pain and pain relieving strategies among adolescents, and need to have adequate resources of time and space to provide support for students.

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