

Pain intensity

Severe pain is characterized by its high level of intensity. It is often described as excruciating, unbearable, or agonizing. The pain can be so intense that it dominates a person's attention, making it difficult for them to focus on anything else. In contrast, moderate pain is less intense and may be described as uncomfortable, achy, or distressing, but it does not reach the same level of intensity as severe pain.

Estimation of a patient's **pain** may have a considerable impact on the level of care that patient receives. Many studies have shown that contextual factors may influence an observer's pain estimation.

The three most commonly utilized tools to quantify **pain intensity** include verbal rating scales, numeric rating scales, and visual analogue scales. Verbal Rating Scales (Verbal Descriptor Scales) utilize common words (eg, mild, severe) to grade pain.

Khatibi and, Mazidi investigated the effect of an **observer's** impression of a person in pain and justification of his/her pain on the observer's pain estimation, tendency to help and perceived empathy.

Thirty healthy individuals (half females) read scenarios aimed to manipulate the reader's impression of characters who ultimately were fired from their work (four positive characters and four negative; half females). Then they observed 1-s videos of four levels of pain expression (neutral, mild, moderate, strong) in those characters during an examination. Subsequently, they rated pain estimation, tendency to help and perceived empathy. Afterward, they rated their likability of characters and how just they find the end of story.

People rated pain in positive characters higher than the pain in negative characters. They also expressed more tendency to help and a higher level of perceived empathy toward positive characters than negative characters. For the highest level of pain in positive characters, perceived injustice toward that person was the best predictor of the observer's pain estimation, tendency to help and perceived empathy. For negative characters, dislikeability was the best predictor of tendency to help and perceived empathy. Justification of their pain was a predictor of pain estimation and tendency to help.

Observers used different information to evaluate pain in positive and negative individuals ¹⁾.

¹⁾

Khatibi A, Mazidi M. Observers' Impression of the Person in Pain Influences Their Pain Estimation and Tendency to Help. Eur J Pain. 2019 Jan 8. doi: 10.1002/ejp.1361. [Epub ahead of print] PubMed PMID: 30620147.

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Last update: **2024/06/07 02:53**

