Central pain processing in patients with shoulder pain : a review of the literature

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Funding or support: NA

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Shoulder pain is a common health problem in which changes in shoulder structure cannot always explain the patient's perceived pain. Central sensitization (CS) might play a role in a subgroup of these patients.

METHODS: The literature was systematically reviewed to address the role of CS in patients with shoulder pain. Electronic databases PubMed and Web of Knowledge were searched for relevant studies.

RESULTS: Eighteen full-text articles were included, methodological quality was scored and information was extracted. Studies were clustered on those studying patients with musculoskeletal (MSK) shoulder pain and those studying patients with hemiplegic shoulder pain (HSP). In particular, Quantitative Sensory Testing revealed hyperalgesia for pressure pain in

the MSK group, whereas these results were inconsistent in patients with HSP. Conditioned pain modulation was reduced in patients with MSK shoulder pain, but is functioning normally in the HSP-group.

CONCLUSION: This review has shown that a great progress has been made towards a better understanding of neurophysiologic pain mechanisms in patients with shoulder pain. Presence of generalized mechanical hyperalgesia, allodynia and impaired conditioned pain modulation in patients with MSK shoulder pain indicate the involvement of the central nervous system. Widespread somatosensory abnormalities observed in patients with HSP could suggest a central origin for their shoulder pain and predispose patients with HSP to develop CS, although results are inconsistent. Additional research is required adopting different assessment methods (especially dynamic methods) in order to establish the role of CS in patients with shoulder pain.

KEY WORDS: central sensitization, pain processing, shoulder, chronic pain, systematic review.

INTRODUCTION

Shoulder pain is the third most common musculoskeletal condition, with incidence rates up to 2.5% , [1,2]. Although more than half of all patients with shoulder pain recovers completely within one year after injury [3–5], the remaining of this group reports persistent shoulder pain [6]. It is suggested in the literature that central sensitization (CS) might play a role in these persistent complaints in (some) patients with shoulder pain[7].

Central sensitization (CS) is defined as an increased functioning of neurons and circuits in nociceptive pathways that leads to pain from innocuous stimuli or an excessive perception of pain from low-level painful stimuli. Continuous nociceptor input eventually results in neuronal plasticity of the peripheral and central nervous system [8]. Sensitivity of the tissues can be altered within the injured area (primary hyperalgesia) but also in the adjacent, uninjured tissue (secondary hyperalgesia); the latter is indicative for CS or central hypersensitivity [9]. Central hypersensitivity has already been found in various chronic pain populations including those with chronic whiplash [10], fibromyalgia [11], carpal tunnel syndrome [12], osteoarthritis [13], tension-type headache [14], temporomandibular joint pain [15], and subacromial impingement syndrome [7].

All these studies found an involvement of central pain processing mechanisms in those pain populations. Despite that there is no gold standard for assessing CS, Quantitative Sensory Testing and paradigms such as conditioned pain modulation and exercise-induced endogenous analgesia are regularly used to evaluate the presence of CS.

Although a lot of research has already been done on the above mentioned chronic pain syndromes, the role of CS in shoulder pain patients has been poorly investigated. Shoulder pain is a prevalent health presentation with complex underlying factors. The exact pathology is not always clear; muscles and joints do not always seem to be the **main cause of the persistent problem** and biomedical approaches **are not always successful**. Shoulder pain can be related to a musculoskeletal problem**,** but is also a common disorder after a stroke [16]. Post-stroke shoulder pain is usually studied and treated as peripheral nociceptive or neuropathic pain, but evidence for the effectiveness of therapeutic interventions is lacking [17]. It can improve during rehabilitation [18], but it may also be a durable or persistent problem [19].

Given the evidence of alterations in the central and peripheral nervous system in many other chronic pain populations [8,9,20], CS might explain why some patients with shoulder pain, both musculoskeletal or post-stroke, do not respond to regular treatment procedures directed to the shoulder. Therefore, the primary aim of this review was to investigate whether there is evidence for abnormal central pain processing in patients with shoulder pain of musculoskeletal or neurologic origin.

METHODS

This systematic review is reported following the PRISMA- guidelines (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) [21].

Eligibility Criteria and Study Selection

To be included in the present systematic review, articles had to evaluate signs of CS (I), as contributor to the pain (O), in patients with shoulder pain (P). The comparison (C) was not defined in order to obtain all articles regarding the presence of CS in patients with shoulder pain. All original study designs were included (S). Articles were eligible for this systematic review if they fulfilled the following inclusion criteria: 1) central pain processing was assessed, 2) in human adults (>18 years) suffering from shoulder pain, and 3) the article reported original research in full text, and 4) published in English, French or Dutch. Studies were excluded if only primary hyperalgesia or peripheral sensitization was assessed, since these are not indicative for CS [22].

Information Sources and Search Strategy

Pubmed and Web of Knowledge were searched to identify relevant articles concerning CS in adults with shoulder pain. The last search took place on May 27, 2015. Three groups of key words which were related to “central sensitization”, “shoulder pain” and “pain” were stipulated for the search. Key words from the different groups were combined. The construct of the search strategy is presented in Table 1. In addition, the reference lists from relevant articles were checked to obtain as complete information as possible. Literature was independently searched and screened by EVL and MD, Bachelors in Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation Sciences. They were trained by MM, who obtained the degree of PhD with the dissertation regarding chronic pain and CS and has published several systematic reviews in this domain.

Data items and collection

Information was extracted from each included study about: 1) design and purpose of the study; 2) characteristics of study participants (including number of participants, mean age, sex and diagnosis) and inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3) methods of assessing the presence of CS; 4) outcome measures; and 5) main results.

Risk of Bias in individual studies

Methodological quality was assessed independently by 2 researchers (EVL and MD), who were blinded from each other’s results. After rating the selected articles, the results of both researchers were compared and differences were analyzed in a consensus meeting. In case of disagreement, the reviewers screened the articles a second time and the points of difference were discussed, until a consensus was made. When consensus could not be reached, a third opinion was provided by the last author (MM).Several checklists were used to assess the methodological quality of the articles depending on the study design. Quality assessment of case-control studies or cohort studies was performed using the Dutch Cochrane Checklist (http://dcc.cochrane.org). Cross-sectional studies were judged with the same checklist as for case-control studies but the questions regarding comparability of groups and blinding were dropped. RCT’s were evaluated with the PEDro scale (http://www.pedro.org.au/wp-content/uploads/PEDro_scale.pdf).

Level of Evidence

After pooling the results, the overall quality of evidence for each outcome was rated with the Grades of Recommendation, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation (GRADE) approach [23].

RESULTS

Study Selection and Study Characteristics

The selection process of the articles is represented in Figure 1. After screening, 18 full-text articles were included in this systematic review. Of the 18 selected articles, 15 were observational studies (nine case-control [7,17,24–30], three cohort [31–33] and three cross-sectional [34–36]) and three were RCT's. The characteristics of the included studies are presented in Table 2.

Methodological Quality

The methodological quality ratings of the reviewed studies are presented in Table 3. There was a 91% of agreement (117 of 129 items). After a second review and a comparison of the 12 differences, the reviewers reached a consensus for all items. The level of evidence of the 10 observational studies was determined for each relevant outcome starting as low-quality evidence according to the GRADE system. For most outcomes of the observational studies, the quality of evidence remained low. These studies showed limitations of the study design and inconsistency of the study results. Limitations were mainly due to not accounting for confounders and outcome measures being self-reported measures. Most cohort studies showed a lack of follow-up.

The level of evidence of the 3 RCTs [37–39] was determined starting as high-quality evidence according to the GRADE system. **T**he methodological quality was low, according to the PEDro-classification. Two RCTs failed to get half of the maximum score [38,39] and were downgraded to a moderate level of evidence.

Study Population

Most studies included patients with chronic shoulder pain [7,17,24–26,28,29,34,36–39]; one study included patients in the acute phase [31], while the rest of the studies did not specifically define the duration of shoulder pain [27,30,32,35]. The population of

patients in the different studies could be distinguished in 2 major groups: patients with musculoskeletal (MSK) shoulder pain and patients with a history of stroke suffering from hemiplegic shoulder pain (HSP).

Studies that included patients with MSK shoulder pain, both unilateral [7,27–30,32,35–39] or bilateral [25], could be separated in different subgroups. Four of these articles were conducted in patients with shoulder impingement syndrome [7,28,30,36]. There were four studies that assessed patients awaiting for surgical treatment of rotator cuff pathology [27,32,35]. Hidalgo-Lozano et al. [37] included elite swimmers with unilateral shoulder pain. Three studies only included female patients [25,38,39]. Ge et al. [38] investigated female Caucasian patients with chronic unilateral shoulder pain, while Persson et al. [39] examined hospital cleaners with unilateral shoulder pain. Patients with uni- or bilateral shoulder myalgia related to the infraspinatus muscle were evaluated in the study by Lannersten and Kosek [25].

Five articles studied CS in patients with HSP[17,24,26,31,34]. HSP was defined by Zeilig et al. [24] as "the presence of shoulder pain for at least 6 months, with no additional characteristics other than ruling out shoulder pathologies prior to the stroke". Similarly, Roosink et al. [31] defined HSP as non-remitting shoulder pain confined to the shoulder and/or C5 dermatome of the contralesional side with an onset after an stroke episode, present during rest or during active or passive motion at both 3 and 6 months post-stroke. This study was part of a prospective cohort study [40] about the development of post-stroke shoulder pain in the first 6 months after stroke and included patients within 2 weeks after stroke. There were 2 articles [31,34] that made a comparison between stroke patients with HSP and controls without HSP. The other three articles [17,24,26] were case-controlled studies that compared post-stroke patients with and without HSP, and a healthy control group.

Evidence for Central Sensitivity

In the following section, the results of this review are structured according to the different aspects of central pain processing that have been identified. Methods for identifying CS are divided in static and dynamic methods for both groups of subjects (MSK and HSP).

1. **Static Methods**

1.1 Quantitative Sensory Testing

1.1.1 Pain Threshold

1.1.1.1. Musculoskeletal Shoulder Pain

Pressure algometry was used as an outcome measure in eight [7,28–30,35–38] out of the 11 studies which were performed with patients suffering from unilateral MSK shoulder pain. Hidalgo-Lozano et al. [37] examined elite swimmers with and without shoulder pain and compared these groups with a control group of healthy elite athletes. Significantly reduced pressure pain thresholds (PPTs) were found in elite swimmers with shoulder pain as compared with healthy athletes over all muscles which were examined. In addition, elite swimmers without pain also presented significant**ly** lower PPTs over the upper trapezius, m. subscapularis and m. tibialis anterior as compared with healthy athletes. Furthermore, no significant differences were found between elite swimmers with and without shoulder pain. From the three studies [7,28,36] performed in patients with unilateral shoulder impingement syndrome, two [7,36] found significantly lower PPTs at all locations (locally at the shoulder and remote at the knee), compared to a healthy control group. However, Albuquerque et al. [28] found no significant differences in PPT between the affected and non-affected side in people with shoulder impingement syndrome SIS; statistical differences were only found between both sides of the SIS group and dominant side of the control group in the m. supraspinatus PPT. Coronado et al. [35] reported significantly lower PPTs at the affected side compared to the non-affected side in patients with rotator cuff pathology, at both local and distal locations, which reflected augmented pressure pain sensitivity. In another study, these same authors [29] found lower PPTs measured locally at the affected side compared to the non-affected side. Furthermore**,** all local PPTs from the patients with unilateral MSK shoulder pain were lower in comparison to healthy controls. However, when considering the remote site, significantly lower PPTs were only found at the affected side of people with unilateral MSK shoulder pain in comparison to the control group.

Ge et al. [38] measured PPTs at TrPs of the painful m. infraspinatus at the affected side, at the same location but at the tender point in the contralateral m. infraspinatus and at a reference point in the m. tibialis anterior in patients with unilateral shoulder pain during normal expiration and elevated intrathoracic pressure (EITP). EITP is described by Ge et al. [38] as “a manoeuvre that increases sympathetic outflow of the skeletal muscle when holding the breath with the glottis closed”. PPTs were significantly lower at the m. infraspinatus of the affected shoulder than at the same point of the unaffected shoulder during both conditions. PPTs during normal respiration and EITP in the m. tibialis anterior were

similar. Gwilym et al. [30] used QST to measure thresholds for mechanical stimuli, by using punctate sharpness threshold and sharpness of a 256 mN punctate stimulus in patients awaiting arthroscopic subacromial decompression. They found a lower mean detection threshold at which the mechanically induced pain from the punctate stimulus was perceived as painful/ sharp in the affected shoulder of patients with chronic SIS compared to controls. In addition, more than half of the patients reported referred pain radiating down the arm. The presence of either hyperalgesia to punctate stimulus or referred pain before surgery was related to worse outcomes 3 months after arthroscopic subacromial depression.

1.1.1.2 Hemiplegic Shoulder Pain

Pressure algometry was used as an outcome measure in four [17,26,31,34] of the five studies performed with people with HSP. Soo Hoo et al. [34] compared patients with HSP with pain-free stroke patients. Patients with HSP had overall significantly lower local PPTs at all locations (e.g. affected and unaffected shoulder, m. tibialis anterior). Moreover, Roosink et al. [17,31] found significantly higher PPT ratios (affected/ unaffected side) **in the affected shoulder of** patients with HSP, already 3 months after stroke [17]. **There** were no differences in PPT at the unaffected side between HSP and pain-free stroke patients [17,31]. In addition, ratios for electric pain threshold and tolerance became significantly different in patients with HSP as compared to both pain-free stroke patients and the healthy control group [17,31]. On the other hand, Lindgren et al. [26] found no significant differences between the group with HSP and without HSP for any of the QST assessments. In addition, the PPTs between the post-stroke groups and healthy controls and wide ranges in PPT thresholds were not significantly different. Thermal pain thresholds (TPTs) and thermal tolerance were measured by Coronado et al. [29,35] in patients with unilateral shoulder pain and rotator cuff pathology. No differences in thermal threshold or tolerance temperatures were found in these studies[29,35].

1.1.2 Hypoesthesia

1.1.2.1 Hemiplegic Shoulder Pain

In both post-stroke groups with and without shoulder pain significantly higher detection thresholds were found as compared to healthy controls for touch, thermal stimuli and graphesthesia in the affected shoulder and lower leg in the study of Zeilig et al. [24]. Furthermore, patients with HSP had higher heat detection thresholds than those without pain, but only at the affected side. In the HSP group, thermal detection thresholds were significantly higher at the affected side

compared to the unaffected side [24]. Roosink et al. [17,31] also found hypoesthesia for tactile [17,31] and electrical sensation thresholds [17] and hypoalgesia (higher electrical pain thresholds EPT [17,31]) were more often observed in patients with HSP (6 months post stroke) as compared to the pain-free patients. HSP was associated with reduced touch sensation, abnormal cold sensation (both reduced and elevated), cold allodynia, reduced sharpness sensation, and sharpness allodynia [19]. Lindgren et al. [26] reported higher thermal thresholds and a wider range of mechanical thresholds in both stroke groups with and without shoulder pain when compared to healthy controls.

2. Dynamic Methods

2.1 Suprathreshold Heat Pain Response

2.1.1 Musculoskeletal Shoulder Pain

Suprathreshold Heat Pain Response (SHPR) results in the perception of elevated pain although the peripheral afferent input is constant or even diminished and is thus considered a perceptual manifestation of augmented central sensitivity [32]. Valencia et al. [32] included this dynamic method in order to acquire the pain modulatory capacity of the central nervous system. They found that the 5th pain rating after five consecutive heat pulses was significantly higher in patients having shoulder surgery as compared to healthy controls. The 5th pain rating decreased significantly from the pre-surgical time point to 3 months after surgery and was comparable to baseline values of the healthy controls. The same SHPR principle was used by Coronado et al. [29], who found **an increased** SHPR of small to moderate magnitude between the affected and non-affected side of patients with unilateral shoulder pain in comparison to pain-free controls.

2.2 Conditioned Pain Modulation

2.2.1 Musculoskeletal Shoulder Pain

Valencia et al. [32] used SHPR as the test-stimulus and the cold pressor test as the conditioning stimulus. Although, there was a significant main effect of CPM, meaning that the conditioning stimulus significantly inhibited the test stimulus in both groups, the patients having shoulder surgery had a lower percentage increase of change for CPM at baseline compared to the healthy controls. The percent change of CPM and the absolute difference on CPM did not change significantly three months later in both groups. Another study by Valencia et al. [27] revealed that **fluctuation** in pain

intensity **of the patient** had no significant effect on between session stability of CPM. In addition, the CPM trial led to significantly greater inhibition **at the pre surgical time point** as compared to the trial after surgery.

2.2.2 Hemiplegic Shoulder Pain

Patients with HSP showed significantly lower hand immersion time (cold pain tolerance) as compared to pain-free stroke patients in both studies of Roosink et al. [17,31]. They found significantly higher EPTs and PPTs after the cold pressor test (CPT) **in these patients, but** no significant differences were found between groups when comparing threshold ratios for EPT and PPT (pre-cold pressor/post-cold pressor) [17,31].

2.3 Exercise-induced Endogenous Analgesia

2.3.1 Musculoskeletal Shoulder Pain

After a unilateral static endurance test at the most painful shoulder, Persson et al. [39] found that the PPT levels over the affected shoulder muscles (i.e. trapezius and deltoid muscle) significantly increased immediately and 10 and 20 minutes after the test in women with chronic shoulder pain. On the unexposed side, the PPTs were significantly increased in the shoulder region only at 20 minutes after the test. Inconsistent changes were found of PPTs measured over the m. quadriceps on both sides.

Lannersten and Kosek [25] showed that patients with chronic unilateral myofascial shoulder pain had significantly lower PPTs at baseline compared to healthy controls at the m. infraspinatus bilaterally, but not at the m. quadriceps. During contraction of the painful (for the shoulder myalgia patients) m. infraspinatus, PPTs increased at all sites compared to baseline at the middle and end of contraction in healthy controls, but not in patients with shoulder myalgia. During contraction of the quadriceps, PPTs increased at all sites compared to baseline at the end of contraction in healthy controls and patients with shoulder **myalgia**.

2.4 Dynamic tactile allodynia and hyperpathia

2.4.1 Hemiplegic Shoulder Pain

Dynamic tactile allodynia was described as pain provoked by a non-noxious stimulus [41]. Hyperpathia was described as the development of a sudden, strong painful sensation that continued after the stimulation was switched off [41]. Higher rates of pathologically evoked pain (hyperpathia and dynamic tactile allodynia) were found in the affected shoulder and lower leg of the HSP-group compared to the HSP-group without shoulder pain [24].

DISCUSSION

The goal of this systematic review was to analyze the scientific literature addressing the role of central pain processing mechanisms in patients with musculoskeletal shoulder pain and those with a history of stroke leading to hemiplegic shoulder pain.

1. Musculoskeletal Shoulder Pain

1.1 Static Methods

There is a level of evidence 2 for the presence of CS in people with MSK shoulder pain. In particular, PPTs were significantly decreased not only at local but also at distal muscles (see Table 2) in patients with shoulder pain when compared to pain-free controls [7,36,37]. Widespread mechanical hyperalgesia (lower PPT measured at a distant site) is a recognized indicator of central hyperexcitability **and indicate the involvement of the central nervous system** [22].

In the study of Hidalgo-Lozano et al. [37] PPTs were lower in both elite swimmers with and without shoulder pain, which was unexpected for the latter. This finding may indicate that pain sensitivity of neck and shoulder girdle tissues to mechanical stimuli in elite swimmers with and without shoulder pain could be associated with the swimming-specific demands or as a result of exercising on a regular/ high intensity basis as seen in many other athletes. There is currently no consensus about the magnitude of the difference in PPT levels necessary to consider real changes between patients with shoulder pain and healthy controls [42]. The lower PPT levels in patients with SIS and elite swimmers with and without shoulder pain in both painful and distant pain-free areas suggest the presence of both peripheral and central sensitization mechanisms [7,37]. Note that in both studies of Hidalgo-Lozano [7,37] the PPT levels were only investigated at the affected side (but also distal to the pain location). Paul et al. [36] also suggested evidence for central hypersensitivity in patients with SIS, although they did not

limit analgesic usage, evaluators were not blinded to case and control subjects (which could have introduced bias) and sex, age and ethnicity of the sample were not standardized. In another study occurrence of CS was investigated in a subgroup of patients with unilateral shoulder pain [30]. In particular, the presence of referred pain, or hyperalgesia, was associated with worse outcomes after subacromial decompression. Therefore, this study showed heterogeneity within patients presenting with SIS and suggested that pre-operatively presence of CS negatively affects outcome three months after subacromial decompression [30].

In contrast to the results for thermal stimuli, pressure stimuli revealed increased pain sensitivity of patients with unilateral shoulder pain, as found in the study by Coronado et al. [35]. This study was limited by the absence of a healthy control group which impedes explicit conclusions about central and peripheral pain processing [35]. Pressure and thermal stimuli measure various modalities of pain processing, with pressure stimuli requiring sensitivity of deep tissue afferents and thermal stimuli requiring C-fibre hyperexcitability [35]. Nijs et al. [43] recommended the use of various modalities for pain sensitivity at local and distal locations if the goal is to determine CS in patients with musculoskeletal pain. Using only one stimulus may lead to inaccurate conclusions regarding the underlying pain processing mechanisms of patients. Inconsistent findings between the pressure and thermal sensitivity in the study of Coronado et al. [35] highlights the necessity of using various stimuli, as it gives a more complete overview of pain processing mechanisms in clinical conditions. Further studies should therefore include various stimuli when investigating the pain profile of patients with musculoskeletal conditions.
In addition to the aforementioned studies, **no difference in** mechanical sensitivity **in SIS patients was found**, therefore no presence of CS was found in these patients [28]. Coronado et al. [29] found a difference between sides in pressure sensitivity in patients with unilateral shoulder pain which supports increased peripheral sensitisation and thus reinforcing this finding.

Ge et al. [38] showed that increasing the sympathetic outflow to the muscle decreased PPTs at the painful and non-painful shoulder, but not at the m. tibialis anterior. Pathological circumstances can cause changes in the peripheral neurons, which may result in interactions between sympathetic and afferent neurons [44], indicating facilitatory contribution of sympathetic hyperactivity to mechanical sensitization. Sympathetic activity may increase the release of norepinephrine which has been shown to interact with nociceptors, but other substances cannot be excluded [45]. Therefore, the presence

of sympathetic activity can facilitate local pain reaction, such as mechanical hyperalgesia and allodynia, which has been demonstrated in patients with myofascial pain syndromes. These mechanisms are probably peripherally mediated due to the fact that only local PPTs were decreased after the sympathetic outflow increased. The results of this study suggest a sympathetic contribution to the underlying mechanisms creating referred pain. However, these mechanisms are still unknown and need to be investigated in further studies. Further work is also required to establish the interactions between sensory and sympathetic systems in the central nervous system.

1.2 Dynamic Methods

There is a level of evidence 2 for the dynamic methods [25,32,39] to evaluate MSK shoulder pain. The results of SHPR in the study of Valencia et al. [32] in the clinical cohort provides direct evidence for altered pain sensitivity before having shoulder surgery. Interestingly, SHPR decreased 3 months after surgery that reasonably may indicate potential reversibility of altered central pain processing mechanisms after eliminating the nociceptive source with operation. In addition, pain intensity decreased significantly 3 months after surgery, but the absolute differences on CPM did not differ between pre- and post-surgical stages [32]. This implies that despite that the local problem can be resolved after surgery and patients' reporting of pain diminish, impaired endogenous inhibition can still be present, indicating that central hypersensitivity may have not been resolved. Future research should investigate which are the indications of having altered central pain processing mechanisms before shoulder surgery and which is its function in the development of chronic postoperative pain.

Two studies used a static endurance test [25,39] to evaluate the influence of exercise-induced endogenous analgesia in patients with shoulder pain. Their findings were rather contradictory. Persson et al. [39] found a proper activation of central antinociceptive mechanisms in chronic shoulder pain patients after static contraction of the painful shoulder. Nevertheless, although PPT values increased, patients' sensation of pain was increased. Contrarily, Lannersten and Kosek [25] only found proper activation of endogenous analgesia in shoulder myalgia patients when non-painful body parts (but not the painful shoulder) were exercised. In fibromyalgia patients (**commonly** centrally sensitized **in a subset of patients**), all contractions induced generalized hyperalgesia independently of where they were performed [25]. These patients have an

overall inability to activate pain inhibitory mechanisms, which supports previous findings [46]. A limitation of this study is that the examiner could not be blinded to the group assigned to each subject.

Besides bilateral pressure hypersensitivity, Coronado et al. [29] also demonstrated also thermal hypersensitivity at local and distal locations compared to healthy controls, which indicates that CS is present. However, the same study also demonstrated side to side differences in pressure pain sensitivity, supporting peripheral sensitization. Therefore heterogeneous findings were obtained according to sensitization processes in patients with unilateral shoulder pain, meaning that neither peripheral nor CS processes were dominant. This may imply that patients with shoulder pain having a similar clinical presentation may not have equal pain processing mechanisms underlying their symptoms. This mixed presentation of sensitization patterns is potentially meaningful for clinical practice and underlines the importance of awareness, because this could explain why some patients fail to recover after standard treatment directed at peripheral targets.

2. Hemiplegic Shoulder Pain

2.1 Static Methods

There is a level of evidence 2 for somatosensory differences, such as reduced PPTS [34] and allodynia [17,24], in patients with HSP, suggesting a role for central hypersensitivity [17,24,34]. In addition, a neuropathic pain component has been shown in this population [17,24,31].

The study by Soo Hoo et al. [34] was the only study that found lower PPTs at local and remote pain-free sites in patients with HSP as compared to pain-free control, suggesting CS. If these findings were restricted to the affected shoulder, it would not be possible to distinguish between peripheral or central hypersensitivity and sensory abnormalities caused by a spinothalamocortical lesion. However, the finding that pain was experienced at lower pressure levels at remote pain-free sites supports the notion that central processes may influence the overall perception of pain in patients with chronic HSP [34].

Recent studies have provided preliminary evidence that patients with HSP have somatosensory abnormalities [17,40,47]. Roosink et al. [17,31] reported the presence of widespread somatosensory abnormalities, such as allodynia and hyperalgesia, already in the first 6 months after stroke. This might suggest the presence of a neuropathic pain component contributing

to HSP. In addition, early occurrence of somatosensory sensitization in the acute phase after stroke might favor the development or maintenance of HSP. However, it was not discernable whether findings are related to central hypersensitivity, because examination sites were limited to the shoulder. Furthermore, results are limited by a small sample size and the fact that evaluators were not blinded to group allocation might have introduced bias. Future studies should include larger samples to provide further information about the role of CS in HSP, as important differences may exist between subgroups of people within this population. In contrast to Soo Hoo et al. [34], Roosink et al. [17] used intra-individual side-to-side comparisons when measuring PPTs. Although this method is more sensitive to detect sensory abnormalities, intra-individual side-to-side comparisons may not be convenient for unraveling widespread hyperalgesia, typical of CS [48].

Zeilig et al. [24] also found differentiated sensory characteristics of the affected shoulder (higher thermal thresholds and high amounts of pathologically evoked pain) in the affected lower leg. These somatosensory abnormalities in a pain-free remote site may suggest a central origin for HSP. In contrast to the aforementioned studies [17,24], no significant differences in the QST assessments were found in the study of Lindgren et al. [26] and thus could not demonstrate the presence of a neuropathic or central component influencing the perception of pain as well as the presence of a widespread neuropathic component. These discrepancies may be explained by different stroke locations, characteristics and intensity of shoulder pain as well as the usage of medicine between studies. The latter may have resulted in a diminished pain perception with psychophysical testing.

Overall results indicate that somatosensory impairments might play a role in patients with HSP, however convincing evidence cannot be determined as these impairments are commonly observed in patients both with and without HSP. The causal role of somatosensory symptoms in the development of HSP should be further explored in longitudinal studies.

2.2 Dynamic Methods

There is a level of evidence 2 for the dynamic methods to evaluate HSP. No difference in CPM was observed in patients with HSP when compared to pain-free controls [17,31]. Impaired endogenous pain modulation may predict the development of CS[49,50] and persistent pain[31] and was reduced or absent in several types of chronic pain patients [51,52]. **The results of** both studies of Roosink et al. [17,31] suggest that HSP is not associated with impaired endogenous inhibition. This may indicate

that CPM is functioning normally in patients with post-stroke pain, although it is plausible that endogenous inhibitory pain pathways may be defective at a higher supraspinal level [52]. This interpretation of the results is limited by the small sample size and the differences between groups in terms of timing and intensity of the conditioning stimulus. CPM should therefore be repeated in a larger study.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this review has shown that a great progress has been made towards a better understanding of neurophysiologic pain mechanisms of patients with shoulder pain. Presence of generalized mechanical hyperalgesia and allodynia in patients with MSK shoulder pain may indicate the involvement of the central nervous system in a subgroup of this population. In addition, enhanced temporal summation and impaired endogenous inhibition in people with MSK shoulder pain are also indicative of CS, although results are not univocal in this regard (e.g. anti-nociceptive response to exercise).

Widespread somatosensory abnormalities observed in patients with HSP suggest a central origin for shoulder pain in this population. Early occurrence of somatosensory abnormalities may predispose patients with HSP to develop CS. This review revealed that CPM is functioning normally in patients with post-stroke pain, though impaired endogenous pain inhibitory pathways at higher supraspinal levels cannot be ruled out. Additional research is now required adopting different assessment methods in order to confirm the preliminary role of CS in subjects with shoulder pain.

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