Sex differences in perceived effectiveness and performance of self-care behaviors for naturally-occurring muscle pain

Women report more musculoskeletal pain than men and are more likely to perform self-care behaviors to alleviate such pain than men, but there may be distinctions between muscle and skeletal pain. This investigation evaluates sex differences in naturally-occurring muscle pain by assessing pain ratings and self-care behaviors performed to decrease pain. The participants were 188 university students (62% women). Data were collected through administration of a questionnaire. Participants rated the levels of pain intensity and unpleasantness experienced in the last week from naturally-occurring muscle pain. Also, the perceived effectiveness and performance of self-care behaviors such as using cold packs or massage to decrease pain were assessed. Furthermore, participants rated the interference in daily activities caused by the pain, difficulty enduring the pain, and the concern they had regarding a relationship between the pain and future health problems. One-way ANOVAs were conducted. No significant sex differences were found in pain ratings, the performance of self-care behaviors, interference in activities, difficulty enduring pain, or future concern for health. However, women perceived exercise to be more effective in relieving pain than men ($F = 5.43, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$). No significant sex differences were found in this investigation with the exception that women found exercise to be more effective than men in decreasing naturally-occurring muscle pain. Previous reports of sex differences in self-care behaviors for pain were unsupported, which may be due to disparities in the samples’ characteristics and/or the type of pain.