Need for Re-evaluation of Distress Responses in Families with Chronic Pain
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**Background**
- The adverse effects of chronic pain reach beyond the individual sufferer to have implications on the entire family. 6,11
- Chronic pain introduces unique psychological, social, and economic challenges into family life.
- Increased emotional and psychological distress responses occur in family members due to accumulating responsibilities and financial strain. 4,13
- Investigations re-evaluating these responses within the context of the economic recession are lacking.

**Purpose:** To identify family distress responses common to chronic pain and the recent economic recession, and to emphasize the need for re-evaluation given the economic recession.

**Method**
- A literature search was conducted in EBSCOhost including all supported databases to identify family responses to chronic pain.
- Responses selected for in-depth review: Emotional distress, depressive symptomatology, and anxiety
- Review of distress responses revealed associations with economic factors, as well as several assessment and intervention strategies

**Economics of Chronic Pain**
Chronic pain within the family was found to cause significant financial strain. This may result from:
- Pain-related disability leading to compromised or lost employment 1,6,16
- Double-income households being reduced to single-income households 1,13
- The experience of chronic pain within the family negatively affecting healthy family members’ work performances 11
- Reallocation of family resources towards chronic pain management, which may be expensive 2

Additionally:
- Healthy family members often assume increased employment responsibilities, frequently in addition to caregiving or parenting responsibilities. 6,7,11-12

**Distress Responses**

**Chronic Pain-Related:**
An overall increase in responsibilities and chronic pain-related financial strain, in addition to altered family dynamics, disruption of interpersonal relationships, and social isolation contribute to the following distress responses. 1,2,4-6,13
- Emotional distress
- Depressive symptomatology
- Anxiety
Of significance, young children of individuals with chronic pain are often the least emotionally protected due to developing cognitive and coping resources. 13

**Economic Recession-Related:**
Many factors of the recent economic recession have increased levels of emotional and financial stress within families, including:
- Unemployment or underemployment
- Decreased household income
- Loss of benefits, including health insurance
- Increasing cost of living
- Upside-down mortgages and foreclosures, which have been associated with increased risk for psychiatric disorders such as depression and generalized anxiety disorder 6,8

Many of these factors often occur simultaneously and can also result in significant interpersonal conflict and disagreement, thereby impairing the integrity of familial relationships. 9

No recent literature was found exploring how family members of individuals with chronic pain are responding in light of the recent economic recession.

A key question that emerged through this review:
- How do the family responses to chronic pain interact with recession-related responses to affect family adaptation, health, and overall well-being?

**Practice Implications**
Healthcare professionals are encouraged to assess individuals with chronic pain and their family members for:
- Accumulation of stress and maladaptive responses
- Economic or financial circumstances
- Family strengths and resiliency

Recommended interventions to reduce family distress responses related to chronic pain include:
- Family health education
- Involvement of family in pain management regimen
- Development of strength-based individual and family coping strategies

Recommended interventions to reduce distress related to economic or financial strain include:
- Interdisciplinary collaboration
- Referral to crisis counselors, social workers, and mental health professionals as appropriate

**Conclusions**
- The responses of emotional distress, depressive symptomatology, and anxiety are common to both family members of chronic pain individuals and those experiencing financial strain or facing foreclosure. 1-3,6,8,11
- For many families in the United States, the economic recession has resulted in unexpected and often concurrent financial stressors, which create trying circumstances for even well-adapted families. 5,13
- Further research to investigate the occurrence and interaction of financial stressors and cumulative distress responses is critical given dramatic changes in the economic environment.

Reference list available upon request.

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