

## Attachment and mentalization (RF) in pre-adolescents with primary headache

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### Abstract

*Introduction:* Primary headaches, in particular migraine and tension-type headache, represent one of the most frequent complaints in pediatric age. The comorbidity rate is very high and include anxiety, depression, attention, sleep and behavioural disorders. The current study explores dimensions of attachment and mentalization (operationalized as reflective functioning) in a sample of pre-adolescents with primary headache in comparison to a control group.

*Method:* 35 pre-adolescents ( $M_{age} = 11.71$ ,  $SD = 2.14$ ) with primary headache and 47 controls ( $M_{age} = 11.59$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) completed the Child Attachment Interview (CAI; Shmueli-Goetz et al., 2008; Cavanna et al., 2018) which was later coded by reliable raters for attachment to caregivers and for reflective functioning using the Child Attachment Reflective Functioning Scale (CRFS; Ensink et al., 2015).

120

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*Results:* The clinical group differs from controls in some CAI scales: in particular sample group shows lower scores in security attachment subscales, as Emotional Openness, Balance of positive/negative references to attachment figures, Use of Examples, Resolution of conflicts and Overall Coherence. Higher scores were otherwise observed in Preoccupied Anger scale in the clinical group. No differences emerged instead in reflective functioning (RF) between sample and controls.

*Discussion:* Preliminary results of our research suggest that pre-adolescents with primary headache differ from controls in different dimensions of attachment, but not in mentalization. Implications for treatment and future research directions are discussed.