



## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Stress at work in migraine patients: Differences in attack frequency<sup>☆,☆☆</sup>



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### KEYWORDS

Migraine;  
Maslach;  
Burnout;  
Stress;  
Chronic headache;  
Work

### Abstract

**Introduction:** Migraine is a common and prevalent disease that contributes to health expenditure and interferes with quality of life. Our goal was to analyse the level of stress at work in a sample of migraine and its possible association with the chronicity of the process.

**Materials and methods:** We applied the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), consisting of 22 items grouped into blocks that assess emotional exhaustion (EE), personal accomplishment (PA), depersonalisation at work (DP) and positive influence (PI), to 94 consecutive subjects recruited in the outpatient clinic. Differences were compared between clinical groups (chronic migraine [CM]: >15 days/month with headache over a 3-month period vs episodic migraine [EM]: <15 days/month with headache) using the general linear model adjusted for age and MIDAS score.

**Results:** The mean age was higher in the CM group. Mean MIDAS scores were  $51 \pm 4.1$  in CM, and  $17.7 \pm 15$  in EM ( $P=0.001$ ). Adjusted means for EE were  $24.6 \pm 2.6$  in CM patients,  $16.2 \pm 2.6$  in EM patients, and  $13.4 \pm 2.3$  ( $P=0.03$ ) in the healthy group. MIDAS scale scores were inversely correlated to PA ( $P<0.05$ ).

**Discussion:** Our results suggest that the level of EE at work is higher in EM than in CM patients, while PA levels decrease as impact on the MIDAS scale increases. The Maslach scale is a potentially useful tool for studying migraine impact. Surprisingly, EE is higher in patients with fewer episodes; this tendency could be related to stress adaptation mechanisms present in patients with chronic illness.

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**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Migraña;  
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Estrés;  
Cefalea crónica;  
Trabajo

**Estrés laboral en pacientes migrañosos: diferencias según la frecuencia de las crisis****Resumen**

**Introducción:** La migraña es un trastorno común y prevalente que contribuye considerablemente al gasto sanitario e interfiere en la calidad de vida de los pacientes. Nuestro objetivo fue explorar el nivel de estrés en el trabajo en una muestra de migrañosos y su posible asociación con la cronicidad del proceso.

**Material y métodos:** Se aplicó el test de Maslach («burnout inventory»): 22 ítems agrupados en bloques que valoran: agotamiento emocional [AE], realización personal [RP], despersonalización en el trabajo [DP] e influencia positiva (IP) a 94 sujetos consecutivos reclutados en consultas. Las diferencias se compararon entre grupos clínicos (migraña crónica [MC] —más de 15 días/mes de cefalea/3 meses— vs. migraña episódica [ME] —< 15 días/mes—) mediante el modelo lineal general ajustado por edad y MIDAS.

**Resultados:** La edad media fue superior en MC. Las puntuaciones medias en la escala MIDAS fueron  $51 \pm 4,1$  en MC y  $17,7 \pm 15$  en ME ( $p=0,001$ ). La media ajustada de AE fue en ME  $24,6 \pm 2,6$ , en MC  $16,2 \pm 2,6$  y en controles  $13,4 \pm 2,3$  ( $p=0,03$ ). La escala MIDAS se correlacionó inversamente con RP ( $p < 0,05$ ).

**Discusión:** Nuestros resultados señalan que el nivel de AE es mayor en ME que en MC; mientras la RP es peor cuanto mayor impacto tiene la migraña según escala MIDAS. La escala Maslach es una herramienta potencialmente útil en el estudio de las repercusiones de la migraña. Sorprendentemente, el AE es mayor en pacientes con menos crisis, lo que podría relacionarse con mecanismos de adaptación al estrés presentes en el paciente crónico.

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**Introduction**

Migraine is a common and disabling disorder. It is one of the most frequent neurological diseases in Spain,<sup>1</sup> where it has an estimated prevalence of 16.6% according to data from a self-administered questionnaire<sup>2</sup> and of 11.02% according to data from the National Health Survey carried out in 2006.<sup>3</sup> It also generates considerable expenditures for the health system; in addition to the direct costs of medication, there are the indirect costs of migraine which include missing days of work or decreased functional capacity. In light of the above, the World Health Organization recognises headache as a high-priority health problem and has ranked it 19th among causes of years of life lived with disability in both sexes and all ages, and 12th in women.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to significantly contributing to healthcare expenditure, migraine interferes with quality of life. It is therefore important to be aware of its disability-creating factors that affect prognosis since this will facilitate disease management. The extent to which migraine affects daily living and the degree of disability it causes have been measured with different scales, which are becoming increasingly widespread since they are easy to use. They include the Migraine Disability Assessment Scale (MIDAS),<sup>5,6</sup> displayed in Table 1, the Headache Impact Test (HIT),<sup>7-9</sup> and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) and Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI).<sup>10-12</sup>

The high impact of migraine on working life cannot be measured merely in lost workdays or in healthcare costs. No studies have addressed the association between migraine and the level of stress at work. An increasingly relevant concept related to stress in the workplace is that of burnout syndrome. Burnout is a response to chronic stress at work

(long-term and cumulative) which has a negative impact on both individuals and organisations. Its distinguishing features reflect specific areas of work (whether professional, voluntary, or household), especially when work involves contact with groups of users and consumers. Burnout is an indicator of emotional exhaustion (EE). Although there are multiple definitions for this syndrome, the most widely accepted one defines burnout as a response to chronic work-related stress derived from EE and negative attitudes and feelings about one's clients and work.<sup>13</sup> Although the real incidence and prevalence of burnout are unknown, we do know that it includes 3 key traits: increased feeling of EE, negative attitude towards third parties, and a tendency to evaluate oneself negatively. As a result, burnout may cause absenteeism, low morale, and work-related problems.

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of migraine and its severity on professional exhaustion in a sample of patients compared to a control group, in addition to studying its potential association with migraine chronicity.

**Subjects, material, and methods**

This cross-sectional study recruited consecutive patients examined at the neurology outpatient clinic at Hospital Universitario Marqués de Valdecilla, in Santander, between 2010 and 2011. Participants were adults diagnosed with migraine at least 6 months prior to the study and who met the diagnostic criteria established by the International Classification of Headache Disorders, Second Edition (ICHD-2)<sup>14</sup> and its revised 2006 version.<sup>15</sup> Subjects were classified into 3 groups according to their clinical history and any necessary

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