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## Judgments of Infant Pain: The Impact of Caregiver Identity and Infant Age

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## ▶ Abstract

**Objective** To examine whether caregiver judgments of infant pain would vary systematically with different infant caregiver groups and infant age. **Methods** A total of 123 caregivers (41 parents, 41 in patient nurses, 41 pediatricians) viewed videotapes of the vigorous behavioral responses of healthy infants (aged 2, 4, 6, 12, and 18 months) to a routine immunization injection and provided ratings of both the affective distress and pain intensity observed. **Results** A principal components analysis of affective and intensity ratings yielded a weighted pain summary score for each injection event. Older infants were attributed significantly more pain than younger infants, even though the vigor of the behavioral reactions was experimentally controlled across age groups. A profile analysis contrasting observer groups indicated that pediatricians attributed significantly lower levels of pain than parents, while nurses were intermediate to the other groups, not significantly differing from either group. These systematic differences in judgments were consistent across infant age


groups. **Conclusions** The findings reveal systematic sources of significant variations in observer judgments of infant pain. Despite an absence of differences in the behavioral reactions of the children, both the type of caregiver and their knowledge of the child's age systematically influenced attributions of pain to infants. This work suggests the important role of caregiver role variation and perceived developmental maturity as determinants of infant pain judgments and highlights potential areas of difficulty in controlling the unnecessary suffering of infants.

**Key words:** infant pain; judgment; nurse; parents; physician.

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