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The survey was conducted by NFO WorldGroup, during 2002 and 2003

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Pain in Europe

A burden on society

One in five people living in often agonising pain, 34 billion euros in lost income and 15 million Europeans considering suicide... welcome to a Europe in pain, highlighted for the first time by the Pain in Europe study.

With over 46,000 people interviewed, Pain in Europe represents the largest and most in-depth long term (chronic) pain survey ever conducted in Europe. The survey aims to reveal for the first time the real impact of chronic pain, and illuminate a pathway for the future management of chronic pain for millions of sufferers.

The attitudinal analysis of chronic pain sufferers was based on the full sample of approximately 5,000 chronic pain sufferers across Europe.

Chronic pain prevalence by country



Spain
11%



Ireland
13%



United Kingdom
13%



France
15%



Denmark
16%



Switzerland
16%



Germany
17%



Israel
17%



Holland
18%



Sweden
18%



Finland
19%



Austria
21%



Belgium
23%



Italy
26%



Poland
27%

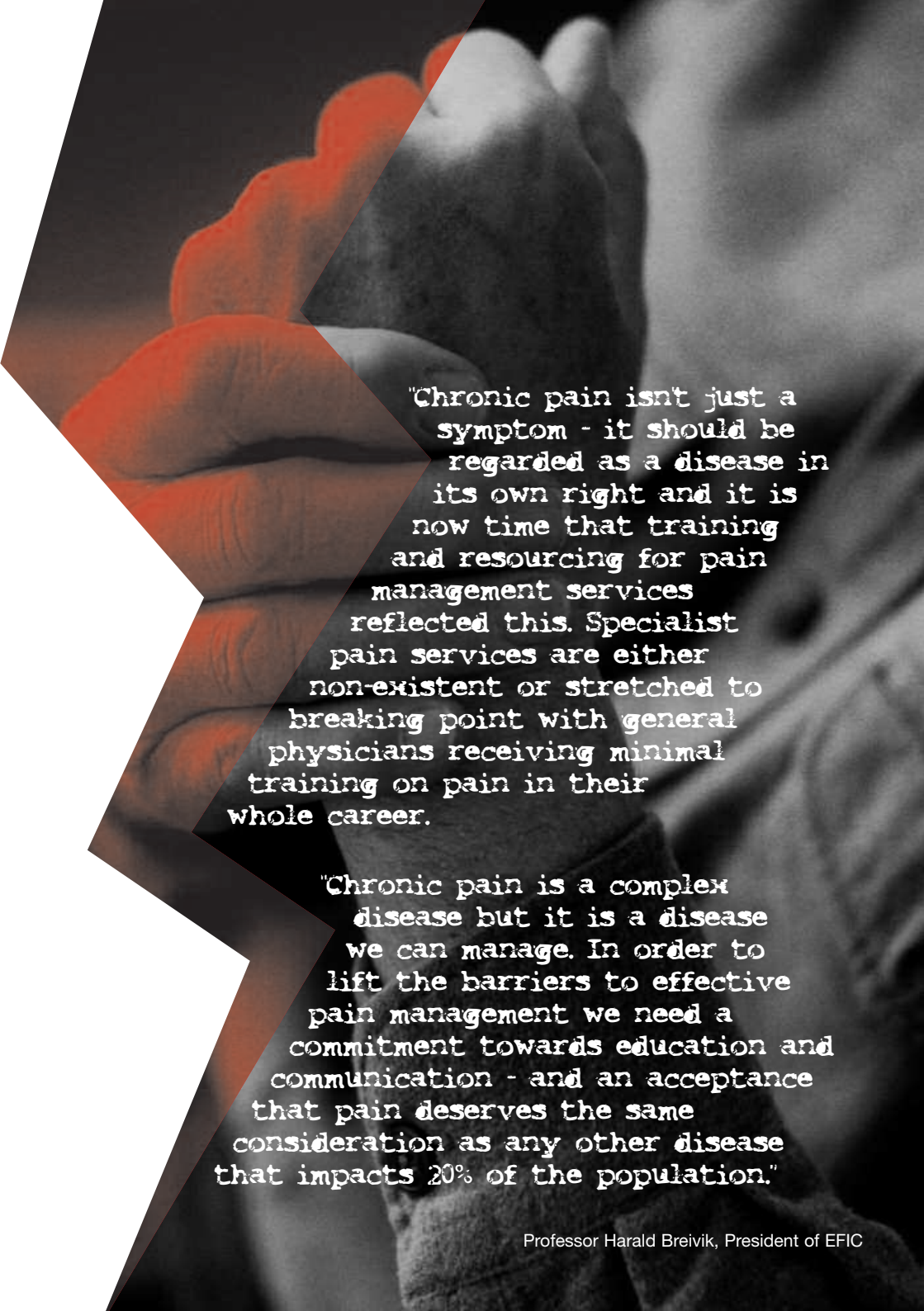


Norway
30%

A widespread problem

Chronic pain is a devastating and widespread problem in Europe, striking one in five adults across Europe:

- **Prevalence is highest in Norway, Poland and Italy, where over one-quarter of adults report suffering from chronic pain**
- Prevalence is lowest in Spain, even so more than one in ten (11%) suffers from chronic pain



"Chronic pain isn't just a symptom - it should be regarded as a disease in its own right and it is now time that training and resourcing for pain management services reflected this. Specialist pain services are either non-existent or stretched to breaking point with general physicians receiving minimal training on pain in their whole career.

"Chronic pain is a complex disease but it is a disease we can manage. In order to lift the barriers to effective pain management we need a commitment towards education and communication - and an acceptance that pain deserves the same consideration as any other disease that impacts 20% of the population."

Professor Harald Breivik, President of EFIC

A long term problem

People with chronic pain have been suffering on average for 7 years; one in five for 20 years or more:

- **One third of patients suffer chronic pain at all times – all day, every day, 365 days a year**
- Time taken to achieve adequate pain control in over 50% of sufferers can take more than 2 years
- A third of sufferers were so weighed down with pain that they felt they could not "tolerate any more"

Chronic pain costs

Across Europe chronic pain accounts for nearly 500 million lost working days every year – costing the European economy at least 34 billion euros.

But the pure costs can only hint at the true loss to the labour force. One in five sufferers has lost a job due to their pain.

Untreated chronic pain can leave sufferers' lives in ruins – impacting on their work and families and often causing depression.

One in five chronic pain sufferers have been diagnosed with depression as a result of their pain:

- Spain has the highest rate of depression (29%) as a result of pain, followed by Norway (28%) – the lowest rate is in Denmark
- Up to half of chronic pain sufferers report feelings of helplessness, or inability to think or function normally

Impact on the everyday

Over 40% of chronic pain sufferers say their pain impacts on everyday activities, from lifting and carrying to taking exercise and sleeping:

- **Nearly one in six chronic pain sufferers feel their pain is sometimes so bad they want to die**
- 34% have their sex lives affected, and 73% find it more difficult to sleep at night
- The problem of social isolation seems most acute in France where the greatest number of sufferers (39%) felt unable to discuss their pain with other people



"Doctors and politicians need to listen to what patients are saying. We hope economic arguments will convince policymakers that patients are being failed by current provisions to deal with pain. More needs to be done to tackle pain head on."

Marit Lovig, a leading member of Norway's chronic pain Patients' Association and former Member of the Norwegian Parliament

Doctor / patient relationships

Despite advances in the management of chronic pain, many chronic pain patients still suffer unnecessarily due to inadequate evaluation, assessment, monitoring and treatment:

- A sizeable proportion (43%) of chronic pain sufferers believe that their physicians are more focused on their illness than their pain
- Nearly two-thirds said they felt "very or extremely satisfied" with the doctor who treats their pain – satisfaction was highest in Belgium (78%) and lowest in Poland, where only 20% of people were "extremely" or "very satisfied"
- **And yet almost two-thirds report that their medication is inadequate at times and only one in ten has been evaluated on a pain scale**
- Worryingly, only 23% have ever been seen by a specific pain management specialist
- One third of patients believe their doctor doesn't know how to control their pain

Treatment of pain

Chronic pain sufferers report that there is considerable room for improvement in the effectiveness of pain treatments:

- Over two-fifths have switched to more powerful medications
- Over two-thirds are prepared to try out new medications
- Patients in Italy and Spain rarely have access to treatment with strong opioids (the strongest of all painkillers) whereas in the UK, Germany, Ireland, and Denmark strong opioids are more often used to provide relief
- Finland makes the greatest use of alternative treatments with 91% of chronic pain sufferers using one or more treatment, while Spain had the lowest with just 56% making use of such treatments

Poorly informed patients

Nearly a third of patients claim they haven't been informed about new methods to better manage their pain. The Pain in Europe survey revealed two possible explanations:

- 65% of patients only see one to two doctors, with 70% of these doctors being GPs who are generalists who haven't specialised in pain management
- 72% of patients receive their information about pain treatments from TV, magazines and newspapers, compared to only 5% who actively sought it out from the internet

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