

# APERF Study Finds Childhood is a Pain in the Leg

One in three children aged between four and six years suffers from 'growing pains', according to an APERF-funded study undertaken by University of South Australia podiatry researcher Angela Evans.

Ms Evans, who presented her research at the recent podiatry conference in Perth, conducted a prevalence survey of 743 children aged 4-6 years, finding that 36% suffered 'growing pains'.

"Growing pains are a frequent reason for visits to a health professional," she said. "Yet, still very little is known about them and they are often dismissed. But this study confirms they have a significant impact on the community."

While 'growing pains' have been cited in medical literature for over 180 years, no known cause has been established for this common childhood complaint.

"Growing pains are defined as pains that occur in both legs, often in the shins, in otherwise healthy children," Ms Evans said. "They often occur at night and are known to wake children. They seem to mostly occur at intervals of one to three months."

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To ensure the accuracy of the data, Ms Evans developed and tested a specific 'growing pains' questionnaire, which was distributed to childcare centres and primary schools throughout metropolitan and regional South Australia.

Of those children reported by their parents to have suffered 'growing pains', 70% were reported to have suffered leg pain at night and 40% were reported to have woken crying due to the pain. Ms Evans's survey found that a third of children with 'growing pains' were taken to see a health professional, and a third received some form of treatment, usually pain medication.

As no specific cause or treatment has been established, parents were often left to deal with their children's distress themselves. Eighty-five per cent of parents rubbed their child's legs to soothe them, while 40% reported giving their child pain medication such as Panadol.

"Now that we have better established a prevalence estimate of 'growing pains' in the community, it's time to look more closely at effective treatments and possible causes," Ms Evans said.

Ms Evans's study generated a lot of interest both inside and outside the conference, offering clinicians greater insight into this elusive childhood complaint and receiving national media coverage in print and on radio, adding significantly to community understanding of 'growing pains'. The dissemination of the research, resulting in multiple publications (including the *Journal of the American Podiatric Medical Association*) will contribute to the knowledge of this subject amongst podiatrists and health professionals world-wide, and the study has laid the groundwork for further studies that may suggest associations, causes and effective treatments.



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"I have really appreciated the support of this research which has come from three main sources," Angela Evans said. "The APERF research grant initiated this work and the generous donors to this research foundation receive my grateful thanks. Brooks Australia were additional sponsors of this project as, of course, were the many schools, parents and children whose contributions were both considerable and gratuitous. APERF research grants are contributing enormously to podiatry research in Australia which ultimately translates into better patient care – and that's what really matters".

*The Australian Podiatry Education and Research Foundation (APERF) was established in 1990 to fund research into the causes, prevention and treatment of foot problems.*

*To find out more about grant criteria, please contact the APERF trustees on 03 9416 3111 or visit [www.apodc.com.au/apodclaperf.htm](http://www.apodc.com.au/apodclaperf.htm)* ■

## 2003 Grants Awarded

The APERF Trustees are pleased to announce the following grant recipients for 2003:

**Rolf Scharfbillig**, University of South Australia, 'The differences in activity, demographics, biomechanics and quality of life between adolescents with Sever's disease and non-symptomatic counterparts'.

**Virginia Bower**, Royal Perth Hospital, 'Determining the validity, predictive value and reliability of the "basic foot assessment checklist" – a primary care screening tool for identifying foot ulcer risk in people with diabetes'.

**Mark Gilheany**, LaTrobe University, 'An evaluation of the effect on health status of first metatarsal phalangeal joint surgery as performed by podiatric surgeons'.