

# Is the prevalence of chronic pain higher in rural areas than in urban areas?

Shannon Elliff

Lossiemouth High school

## Background

Chronic pain is pain that lasts three months or more. There is evidence suggesting there is a higher prevalence of chronic pain in rural areas compared to urban areas. Several factors could be at play, such as differences in healthcare service availability and accessibility and also differences in work type, with a higher frequency of farming or other hard manual occupational activities in rural areas, that result in repetitive joint use. **This study aimed to explore for a difference in chronic pain between rural and urban areas using a literature review methodology.** This work contributed to the University of Aberdeen's 'dot.rural' Digital Economy Hub TOPS project (Technology to support Older adults: maximising Personal and Social interaction).

[www.dotrural.ac.uk/tops](http://www.dotrural.ac.uk/tops)

## Methodology

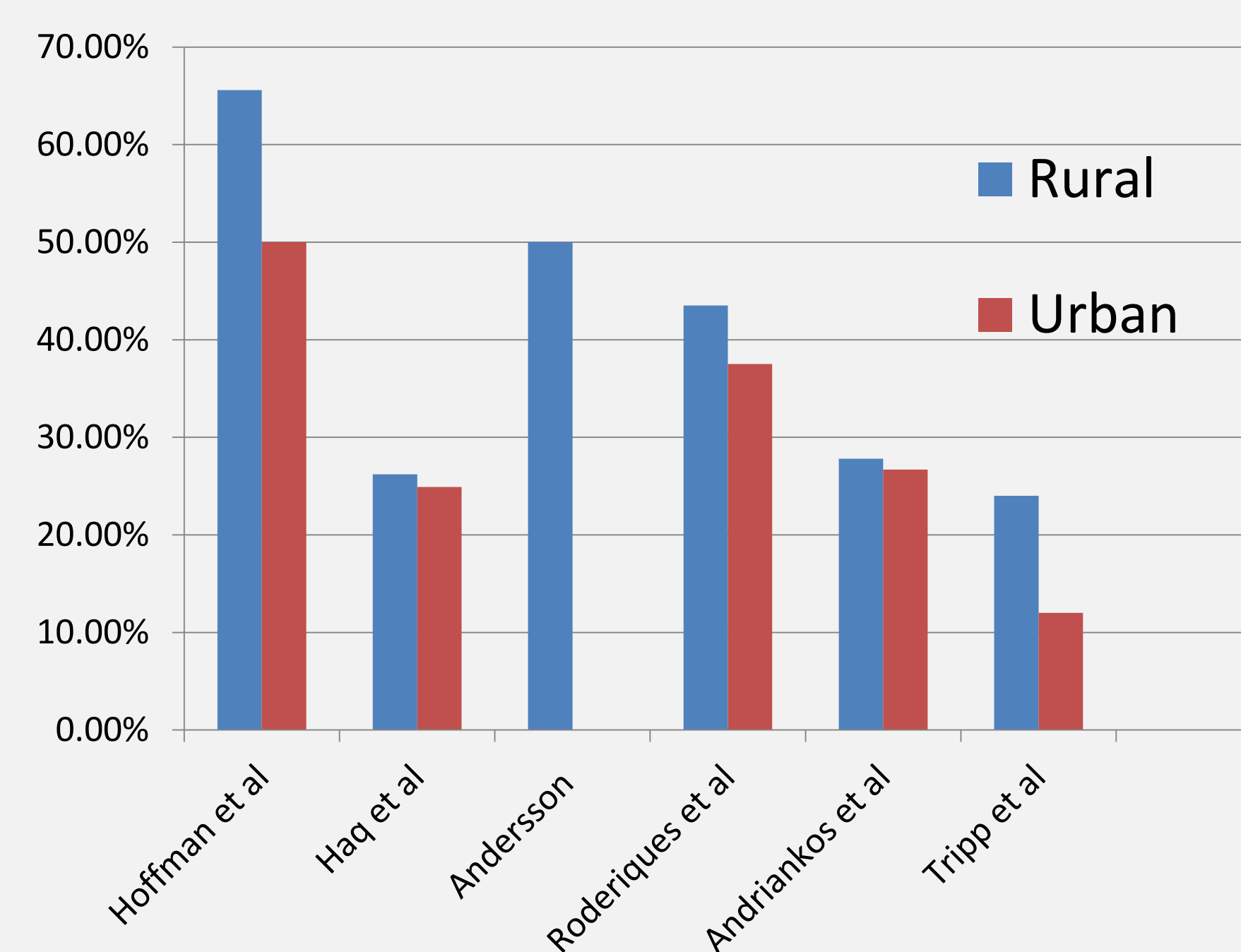
Search terms such as 'Chronic pain AND rural' were entered into online databases including Scopus and Pubmed to find peer-reviewed research articles containing data about the differences between chronic pain in rural and urban areas. The search was narrowed down by date (1993-2013). Also, expressions of opinion (e.g. editorials) were excluded. **A total of six articles were selected for review.**

## Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the difference in chronic pain prevalence between urban and rural settings. A higher prevalence was found in rural areas. Different theories, such as those mentioned in introduction suggest why this is. Also, there is a notion that social support may be less available for rural individuals as they are more likely to live in isolated environments. Social support has been linked to functional and coping ability, making it more likely those in isolated environments could struggle with pain. If there is cause to believe that chronic pain in rural areas is an issue, then one potential solution is to make healthcare easier to access for those living in remote areas, potentially through the use of innovative technology

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## Results



**39.52%**  
Mean Rural  
Prevalence of  
Chronic Pain

**30.22%**  
Mean Urban  
Prevalence of  
Chronic Pain

A majority of studies reported a higher prevalence of chronic pain in rural areas than in urban areas. The graph above shows the % findings of chronic pain in rural and urban areas.

## Conclusion

**There was a higher prevalence of chronic pain in rural areas than in urban areas. However, this should be taken with caution as relatively few articles were available for inclusion, with much variation in method, including differences in defining chronic pain and rurality.**