



Systematic review

Psychosocial aspects of everyday life with chronic musculoskeletal pain: A systematic review



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Living with chronic pain can have consequences for quality of life and disability.
- Consequences of chronic pain can be depressive thoughts and interpersonal conflicts.
- Tendency towards that nonspecific pain patients are more affected than specific pain patients.
- Living with chronic pain can have far-reaching consequences for everyday life.

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ABSTRACT

Background and objective: Chronic pain is a growing phenomenon worldwide. It is considered a medical problem because, besides the socio-economic issues involved, pain is often accompanied by psychosocial problems. Apart from the physical pain, living with chronic pain has many additional consequences. People living with chronic pain generally suffer from other physical and psychological consequences. The impact of chronic pain varies enormously between individuals, but the suffering is frequently pervasive and detrimental. The objective of this study was to review the evidence concerning, ways in which people living with chronic pain are affected in their everyday lives.

Methods: Electronic databases Scopus, Cinahl and PsycINFO were searched from 2008 to September 2012 using a 'building blocks' approach and reference lists were scanned. PubMed was also searched and checked for duplicates compared to Scopus, Cinahl and PsycINFO. Data were extracted from included studies and methodological quality assessed with a view to exploring quality differences. To guide the review and interpretation, individual components of methodological quality were compared against a checklist. A narrative synthesis was formulated involving three categories: (1) clinical aspects, (2) everyday life aspects and (3) interpersonal aspects.

Results: The search strategy identified 1140 citations; one study was found during the preliminary searching through references, and a search of reference lists provided five publications. Of these, 24 publications, representing 23 populations, met the inclusion criteria. In total, there were 22 cross-sectional studies and 2 cohort studies. Study populations ranged from 74 to 3928 participants and were heterogeneous in nature across studies with respect to age, duration and localisations of pain and outcome measures. We found a general consensus that life with chronic pain was associated with higher prevalence and higher levels of depression and diagnoses of widespread pain and nonspecific pain are more clearly associated with depression than is specific pain. The results of link between chronic pain and anxiety and stress were not obvious. Overall, there is plausible evidence to suggest a positive relationship between chronic pain and disability and the evidence is stronger for a significant positive association between nonspecific

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pain and disability, compared to specific pain. It can be summarized that there is a lack of evidence for a relationship between intensity of pain and quality of life. However, there is evidence that nonspecific pain is more compellingly associated with low quality of life than is specific pain.

The evidence of a positive relation between pain and problems in close relations is not convincing but there is an indication to suggest that there is a pain-related issue regarding participation in many social aspects of everyday life.

Conclusion: Besides the pain itself, people living with chronic pain are affected in other aspects of life. In particular, it is evident that they experience challenges with respect to depressive thoughts, disability, lower quality of life and conflicts in close relationships.

Implications: When designing interventions for people with chronic pain, it is essential to take into consideration the fact that living with chronic pain has far-reaching consequences beyond the pain suffered.

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1. Introduction

Chronic pain is a growing phenomenon worldwide. It is considered a medical problem because, besides the socio-economic issues involved, pain can also have psychosocial consequences [1,2]. Apart from the physical pain, living with chronic pain has many additional consequences. People living with chronic pain generally suffer from other physical and psychological consequences. The impact of chronic pain varies enormously between individuals, but the suffering is frequently pervasive and detrimental. A comprehensive investigation of Breivik et al. [3] shows that chronic pain of all causes occurs in 19% of adult Europeans and musculoskeletal related disorders are the most common causes. They emphasize that chronic pain is a major health care problem in Europe and it needs to be taken more seriously. In the present review we focus on chronic musculoskeletal pain.

The link between chronic musculoskeletal pain and psychological risk factors has already been investigated in reviews of the literature [4–6]. Conclusions vary greatly. In one review, psychosocial risk factors show very modest predictive ability on low back pain [5], while in other conclusions psychosocial factors are shown to play a significant role in the development and maintenance of chronic pain problems [4,6]. The present study concerns how people suffering from chronic pain are affected in their everyday lives. In other words, consequences of living with chronic pain on psychosocial factors.

The review was conducted with a view to enhancing knowledge about the relationship between chronic musculoskeletal pain and psychosocial factors and to inform healthcare professionals as well as decision-makers within the health care system about this knowledge.

The term ‘chronic pain’ and related terms are not used in a consistent way, e.g., persistent pain and long lasting pain are used synonymously in the literature. In this review, the term ‘chronic pain’ is defined as pain that continues or recurs over a prolonged period, caused by various abnormal conditions, and with a duration ≥ 3 months [7].

The objective of this study was to review the evidence concerning, ways in which people living with chronic musculoskeletal pain are affected in their everyday lives. The discussion of results is thematised according to the results of the systematic search and inspired from The World Health Organization’s definition of psychosocial factors.

The World Health Organization defines psychosocial factors as those factors pertaining to a person’s ability to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. This involves a person’s ability to maintain a state of mental well-being and to demonstrate this in adaptive and positive behaviour while interacting with others, his/her culture and environment [8]. To capture the totality and complexity of consequences of an everyday life with pain, this systematic review thematises the results in three categories: (1) clinical aspects, (2) everyday life aspects and (3) interpersonal aspects.

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