

Available online at www.sciencedirect.com

ScienceDirect

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/burns

Women's recovery, negotiation of appearance, and social reintegration following a burn[☆]

Bianca Dekel^{a,*}, Ashley van Niekerk^{a,b}

^a Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council, South Africa

^b Institute for Social and Health Sciences, University of South Africa, South Africa

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Accepted 12 December 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Africa

South

Body image

Burn injury

Narrative inquiry

Resilience

ABSTRACT

The gendered nature of postburn coping has received scant research attention in South Africa, a country that has a high rate of burns with significant concentrations among women. In this study, narratives that emerged from in-depth interviews with seven women were examined. The narratives emphasized essential needs of these burn survivors for personal support, the complexities of negotiating intimate relationships, struggles with the humiliation from family and friends, in some instances strained relationships with children, the support found through religious beliefs and institutions, and often frustratingly slow psychological acceptance of scars. These difficulties faced by women survivors of burns have highlighted the need to include religion/spirituality, intimate male partners, and women's children into the psychological recovery process, in an attempt to assist women's journey to psychological and emotional healing after burn.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd and ISBI. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Burns remain a major cause of morbidity and mortality in Africa, with South Africa among the countries that report high rates of burns [1]. Burns have tremendous psychological impacts on the affected individuals [2]. Burn injuries suddenly disrupt normal life, threaten the individual's health and bodily integrity and might require intensive, invasive and often long-lasting physical treatment. Survivors are often faced with permanent scarring and in some cases with limited functionality [2]. A burn injury inflicts a traumatic assault to the body and mind, which presents extraordinary challenges to a

survivor's well-being and psychological resilience [3,4]. Burn scars are cosmetically disfiguring and force the scarred person to deal with an alteration in body appearance [5,6]. The change in appearance from unremarkable to conspicuous is abrupt, and the survivor's adjustment is complex; the affected person has to deal with both their own reaction to their altered body as well as other people's responses to it. This process is frequently described from two overlapping perspectives: "the view from the outside" (of the person in a social environment), and "the view from the inside" (the person's psychological reaction) [6].

Women and men tend to cope differently with a burn [7]. Comparisons between female and male burn survivors have

[☆] The manuscript, including related data, figures and tables has not been previously published and the manuscript is not under consideration elsewhere.

* Corresponding author at: Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council, Francie van Zijl Drive, Parowvallei, Cape, PO Box 19070, 7505 Tygerberg, Cape Town, South Africa.

E-mail address: Bianca.dekel@mrc.ac.za (B. Dekel).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.burns.2017.12.004>

0305-4179/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd and ISBI. All rights reserved.

indicated that female burn survivors tend to have less social competencies and a lower self-esteem than male survivors and are therefore, more vulnerable to the development of trauma related symptoms such as depression [8]. A woman's greater traumatization has been attributed to gender differences in biological responses, self-concepts, and coping styles [9]. Differences also exist in terms of neurohormonal, affective, social and cognitive factors associated with gender to manage trauma-related distress [9]. Women tend to experience higher rates of depression, panic disorder, and somatic complaints than men, whereas men report higher levels of problematic aggression and other externalizing behavior [9]. This suggests that women and men cope with burn trauma differently, for example, by either slipping into a depression (women) or showing overt aggression (men) in response to their new appearance.

In general, women experience more social hardship, leaving them more susceptible to experiencing related traumas, such as sexual abuse, which is more prevalent amongst women [10]. One of the reasons for this is that women have less social power and status than men in most societies (including much of South Africa) and as a result, experience more chronic strains, such as poverty and constrained choices. For example, in many societies, women earn less money than men, are more likely to be sexually harassed on the job, and frequently have full-time jobs with the added burden of child care and domestic chores [10].

Women and men furthermore develop psychological disorders or difficulties at different rates and ways, with vital clinical correlates dissimilarly presented. It is imperative to consider that the course of psychological recovery might progress differently for women and men. These observed gender differences indicate differential clinical needs and specific treatment requirements. However, the current literature regarding gender differences in postburn coping is especially limited as compared to the wealth of information available regarding the clinical and epidemiological descriptions of burn injuries [11].

South Africa is a setting with a high and unequal distribution of burns, limited supportive health and social services, and concerns about the integration prospects of survivors. Despite recent support geared toward more effective rehabilitative efforts, the gendered nature of postburn survival and coping has received scant attention, with a dearth of local research [12]. There are limited, if any in-depth explorations into the gendered postburn coping experience from the perspective of survivors, particularly in adverse settings such as South Africa. The focus from the burn injury event itself to a consideration of the aftermath of the injury in the contexts of coping, social reintegration, and reconstructions of self in the meaning-making process is required for the support of survivors. In this study, we explored how women coped psychologically postburn. We were guided by three research objectives:

- to explore women's experience of a burn and their altered appearance;
- to investigate the identity reconstructions of women burn survivors; and
- to ascertain their social reintegration experiences.

2. Methodology

We employed a qualitative research design informed by social constructionism, an interpretive approach, which proposes that a subjective sense of reality is the basis for understanding and explaining social life. This belief is aligned with the premises of symbolic interactionism, that human coping is based on meanings and understandings derived and ascribed to events (such as a burn injury) and that such ways of coping are socially negotiated with others and society through language and thought [13]. We aimed to afford burn survivors the opportunity to speak their personal truths about their postburn coping through their narratives.

The narrative research approach informed by social constructionism thus, presented a valuable tool to engage with and explore the coping mechanisms employed in the postburn experience. Narrative research involves the use of personal storytelling as a source of knowledge production. This approach assumes that people's lives are socially constructed through the multiple contexts and situations they find themselves in and thus, their stories are influenced by the historical, social, economic and cultural contexts within which they occur [14].

Furthermore, we asked questions surrounding the positive, transformative, and resilient aspects of coping, which we acknowledge coexist alongside the challenging aspects of coping [15]. According to this positive framework, it is proposed that "a science of positive subjective experience, positive individual traits, and positive institutions promise to improve quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless" [15, p. 5]. There is a focus on pathology, which has resulted in conceptualizations of the human being that has underrepresented the positive features, which assist with coping [15,16].

2.1. Participant characteristics

Purposive sampling was used so that we were able to handpick participants to be included for a specific reason and therefore, develop a sample that was suited to the needs of the study [17]. Our inclusion criteria extended to recruit women who experienced a burn injury between one and two years prior to the interviews, irrespective of cause and specific circumstances surrounding the burn. The size and location of the burn was also not considered, as we aimed to explore the range of adjustment experiences of women irrespective of size or location of the injury. To meet the aims of the study, participants had to have an adequate level of communication to reflect on their coping experiences and to be able to express themselves fluently in English. We recruited all interested women burn survivors. This resulted in a group of seven participants. Six of the participants came from low-income areas within South Africa with limited financial and structural resources and only one participant was from a more affluent area with a wider variety of resources. The age range at the time of the interviews was from 19 to 45 years and the mean age was 27 years.

Two participants had sustained injuries in the home because of accidents, one participant was burnt intentionally

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8694610>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8694610>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)