

The Experiences of Women Living with Fibromyalgia Pain: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Objectives

Fibromyalgia is a poorly understood chronic pain condition which encompasses a wide range of symptoms and often leads to impaired functional status. The present research aimed to explore the fibromyalgia pain experience from the perspective of women with the condition.

Design

The research used a qualitative design to allow for in depth fibromyalgia descriptions and thematic analysis was used for flexibility.

Methods

10 women were recruited to take part in the research via purposive sampling on a social networking site and interviews took place in participants own homes and on university campus. Semi structured interviews were audio recorded with participant permission, an interview schedule was used as a guide and all interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Results

Thematic analysis was used to identify 5 super ordinate themes: symptoms, fibromyalgia impact, coping, support/lack of support and understanding/lack of understanding. Participants described debilitating symptoms which reduced function and lead to the utilization of coping strategies and familial social support. Participants also described a lack of understanding about their condition, especially from the medical community, which led some to avoid these interactions. Peer support was also avoided due to perceptions of negativity.

Conclusions

Women in this sample described using familial social support and other methods to cope with their condition, although most avoided unnecessary medical interactions due to perceptions of lack of knowledge and lack of understanding. Future research should develop appropriate interventions to increase healthcare utilization and practice should focus on patient centred care.