

ABSTRACT

Living with a never ending pain: Meanings of pain for women with fibromyalgia

Objectives

Living with fibromyalgia (FM) means living with a chronic pain condition with a considerable impact on daily life. The majority of people with FM are middle-aged women. The aim of this study was to elucidate meanings of pain for women with FM.

Method

This study used a qualitative research approach as the aim was to elucidate meanings. Fifteen women with FM aged between 38 and 64 years (md=54) participated in the study. The criterion for participation was that the women were diagnosed with FM in accordance with the criteria from American College of Rheumatology (Wolfe et al, 1990). The participants had experienced symptoms between 6 and 38 years (md=25), and the time range from diagnosis varied from 1 to 20 (md=10) years. The women were recruited from a rehabilitation centre (n=4) and from Association for Rheumatism and FM (n=11), all in the northern part of Sweden. Personal interviews with a narrative approach were carried out with the participants. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim. The interview texts were analysed using a phenomenological hermeneutic interpretation described by Lindseth and Norberg (2004) and inspired by the philosophy of Ricoeur (1976). The analysis consisted of three phases; the naïve understanding, the structural analysis, and the comprehensive understanding. The interpretation was conducted in as open-minded manner as possible, with an awareness of our pre-understanding as nurses and as nurse researchers.

Findings

The findings show that meanings of pain for women with FM can be understood as living with a never ending pain. The ever-present pain was described as unbearable and overwhelming and dominated the women's whole existence. Nevertheless, all the women

tried to normalize life by doing daily chores in an attempt to alleviate the pain. They learned to care for and comfort themselves and eventually they became reconciled with the fact that pain was a part of their everyday life which gave feelings of living a good life despite pain and limitations.

Discussion

As women with FM lived with an aggressive, unpredictable pain and were questioned by others because of the invisibility of the pain implies living with a double burden. Not being seen as credible induces feelings of not being confirmed which can cause suffering. Living a daily life controlled by pain also add to the suffering. In order to support the women's needs and help them to feel well despite their pain it is important that nurses and healthcare personnel acknowledge and understand women with FM and their pain experiences. The findings in this study represent one way of understanding meanings of pain for women with FM. The findings cannot be generalised but can be transferred to similar situations or participants.