Reviewer’s report

Title: Sexual health for women with RA in relation to physiotherapy - a qualitative study

Version: 2 Date: 15 April 2010

Reviewer: Mari Bjorkman

Reviewer’s report:

The manuscript has been substantially improved. However, I do not think it is ready for publication yet. The manuscript has good potential, and can become a good article through a second revision. The need for revision concerns the results chapter and the result discussion section. I think the rest of the manuscript is good, but I have a few small comments before I comment more thoroughly on the mentioned chapters.

The description of the informants could include the name of the region where the study was conducted, or at least the name of the country. Medication is described, which is good, but I am not familiar with the term “biological medications” and I ask that it is either explained or named differently. The informants should not be labelled patients. 3 informants used biological medication, 4 had other DMARDs, 1 had no DMARDs – what about the remaining 2 informants? When the number is so accurate, I think all informants should be described. I agree with the authors, contrary to the other reviewers, that the description of the informants is sufficient and should not include a table of demographic information. Too detailed information may lead the reader to misinterpret generalisability. I also agree with the authors that the number of informants is sufficient in this design (qualitative, individual interviews).

The manuscript has to be proof-read again because small errors of grammar and spelling still exist.

THE RESULTS CHAPTER

The analysis is improved and the results section is substantially better in this version. However, the analysis still seems incomplete. The titles of the three subthemes either does not make sense, or is not entirely consistent with the contents. The titles of the subthemes should be reconsidered, and only findings belonging to that subtheme should be included in that particular subtheme section. Each result has to be put into the right category, in other words. The citations should be scrutinized for meaning. Citations that do not illuminate the content of the preceding paragraph should be omitted. The number of citations should be reduced.

Impacts of RA on body and life.

I understand what the sentence in the heading means, but what about it concerns the aim of the study?
Physical impacts of RA: Lists symptoms of RA. Lists physical problems during sex. That is okay. Includes two sentences about body image, I had expected body image to be a larger issue for the informants? Maybe that could be elaborated in the discussion? The citations under “body image” seem to belong to “physical problems during sex”.

Psychological and emotional: Why use both the words psychological and emotional if there is no clear distinction between them? If there is a distinction I have not seen, it may be highlighted in some way. Lists psychological symptoms due to living with RA, but how are they connected to sexual health? “Increased psychological strength” would have been interesting to explore, or at least comment, because the rest of the sentence contains only negative aspects.

Relational: “impacts of RA were experiences both concerning sexual health and other areas of present and/or earlier relationships”. What is the reader supposed to understand from that sentence? Not all citations illuminate the topic.

Multidimensional relationship.

What does the heading mean? I think this section describes what the informants think sexual health is, and if that is the case, why not just say that in the title?

“Sexual health was experienced as a multidimensional relationship containing physical, psychological and sexual aspects of a relationship.” This sentence is difficult to understand clearly. Two kinds of relationships? The content seems to be a repetition from the section above, and it does not seem specific to RA patients.

“Some informants had no sexual desire and were negative to sexual activities”. How did this affect their relationships?

Possibilities to increase sexual health.

A clear and good title.

“Reflections of improvement in sexual health were a new field for the informants”. I think that is quite surprising, as they report sexual problems, and this could have been elaborated in the discussion.

“Direct experienced effects of physiotherapy” seems to me to be the focus of the study, and deserves more attention.

DISCUSSION

The authors say that a qualitative method was chosen because this is an explorative first study in the field. I think a qualitative method is clearly the most suitable method when exploring a subject like sexuality. Qualitative methods are especially suitable to achieve knowledge of thoughts, intentions, experiences, reasons, and so on. The same information could not have been obtained by quantitative methods.

The discussion of methodology is good. Generalisability could have been more extensively discussed. After all, the aim of research in general is to be able to transfer knowledge from the informants to other patients or therapists, and the
authors seem too cautious in their assessment of the transferability of their findings.

The discussion of the results is too long and unfocused. The division of the results discussion into sections similar to those in the results chapter make the reader loose track of the main conclusions of the study, and it brings about unnecessary repetitions from the results chapter. The discussion should go beyond a comparison with similar findings in other studies with the form “we found this, they found that”. The authors should emphasis the most important findings, what is new or most startling, and describe and discuss them so that the reader can learn. I assume that the authors wanted to learn something that can be brought back to the physiotherapy clinic. Make clearer for the reader what that might be. A useful exercise is to try and list “What does this study add” and “What’s known from before” when preparing to discuss the results. The middle part of the section “possibilities to increase sexual health” about the potential contributions of physiotherapy is useful. The outline of focus for future research is good.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion contains four points. That is a useful way to present conclusions, but the points should contain more of “What does this study add”. “Experienced negative impacts of RA on body and life were physical, psychological, emotional, and relational.” That can hardly be a new or unexpected finding? I think there are other, more interesting conclusions that can be drawn from the material.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.