Reviewer's report

Title: Experiencing and controlling time in everyday life with chronic widespread pain: a qualitative study

Version: 1 Date: 26 July 2007

Reviewer: Alison M Elliott

Reviewer's report:

General
The aim of this paper was to explore the extent to which time is disrupted by mundane tasks and aspects of everyday life amongst people with chronic widespread pain.

The paper comes from a well-respected research unit in the field of musculoskeletal pain. Overall, the paper is reasonably clear and well written, and the methods and analysis are appropriate.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

Background
I’d like to see a more clearly stated aim at the end of the Background rather than a summary of what the paper focuses on.

Methods
Participants: Eight participants were selected from responders to a previous study who agreed to further contact and had CWP. Were these the only participants that met the selection criteria or did they purposively sample these participants from a wider group? If so, what additional criteria were used to select individuals?

Data generation: More information about the different approaches would be useful.
• For the diary - What were participants asked to record and over what time period?
• For the lifegrid follow-up interviews - How standard were the interviews across the participants and how much did the lifegrids dictate the questions?
• Family member interviews: were these separate interviews or joint interviews with the CWP sufferer?
• For each of the approaches how long did the interviews last?

Results and Discussion
In their Introduction the authors state that the article is going to focus on Corbin’s concepts of “clock time” and “perceived time”. However, they rarely refer back to these concepts in the Results and Discussion. In fact I couldn’t find any reference to “perceived time” specifically and in the Conclusion it is the concepts of “clock time” and “internal time” that are mentioned. Having outlined these concepts at the start as the focus of the article it is important the authors are a bit more explicit about how their findings relate directly to Corbin’s time concepts.

Some of the interpretation seemed stretched. For example on p14 the authors state that Duncan permits himself to take a longer time to have a shower in an attempt to regain control of time. My reading of the excerpt was that Duncan had a task to do and he knew it would take a long time, but since he knew he had to do it he just had to cope with the fact that it would take longer. I didn’t perceive that he was permitting himself a long time to do the task in an attempt to regain control of time.

There was no discussion of any strengths or limitations of the work. For example, how generalisable do the authors think the findings are to other people with CWP? All but one of their participants had stopped work due to their health. This will have had a large affect on how time impacted on their lives. Not everyone with CWP has to give up work and so the authors should discuss how this may have affected findings.

Conclusion

The authors conclude that “controllable time” is an important concept to emerge from this work and that it should stand alone. They also accept that this concept underlies some of Corbins elements of time. I don’t think the authors make a strong enough case for their new concept being a stand alone concept distinct from Corbins work. I think they need to be clearer about what they feel is encapsulated here that Corbin doesn’t cover when he talks about time that is uncertain and open to disruption.

In the final paragraph of the paper the authors state that it may be helpful for healthcare professionals to recognise the different ways in which uncertainty inherit in CWP disrupts everyday experience of time. It would be useful if the authors expanded on why this could be helpful and how they envisage this being used by health care professionals.

In the Abstract they conclude that regaining control over time has potential as a target for pain management in primary care. The authors do not come back to this point in their main conclusion. Do they perceive “controlling time” as part of a pain management program where people are taught possible ways to do this? It would be useful for the authors to expand their Conclusions to be explicit about how this paper could inform pain management.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)
Methods
At the end of the participants' paragraph the authors state the types of previous work and household make-up of participants. While this is useful information it is all included in Table 1 and is therefore unnecessary duplication.

Typo page 7: “...diary interviews allow topics that arose in diary interviews to be explored further”. Presumably the second “diary interviews” should just be "diaries".

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
N/A

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

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.