Author's response to reviews

Title: The Effect of Psychological Interventions on the Prevention of Pain in Adults: A Systematic Review Protocol

Authors:

Mélanie Bérubé (melanie.berube2@mail.mcgill.ca)
Céline Gélinas (celine.gelinas@mcgill.ca)
Manon Choinière (manon.choiniere@umontrea.ca)
Nancy Feeley (nancy.feeley@mcgill.ca)
Géraldine Martorella (gmartorella@fsu.edu)
Stefan Parent (stefan.parent@umontreal.ca)
David Streiner (streiner@mcmaster.ca)

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Author’s response to reviews:

Comment #1

It seems highly likely that there will be significant clinical heterogeneity in both the interventions and comparators. The authors have chosen to address this through subgroup analysis with their main comparison basically being any psychological intervention versus anything else (that isn't a psychological intervention). It is not my area but it seems to me that a leaflet and a course of physiotherapy are very different interventions. I suggest that they need to consider and justify this approach - are there any types of intervention that are so different that they should be considered separately upfront.

Response from authors:

Since psychological intervention and comparators may be sources of heterogeneity, we aim to conduct subgroup analyses for each psychological intervention type and each comparator type individually. In this regard, information through leaflet or any other forms will be considered as a comparator type and physiotherapy as an active form of treatment comparator type.

We have added precisions in page 14 on how interventions and comparators will be considered in the subgroup analysis.

Comment #2:
I suggest that the authors also need to consider whether the comparisons they are making are unconfounded. For example, if I understand correctly they may compare a psychological intervention + physiotherapy vs a leaflet and (through the meta-analysis) attribute difference to the psychological intervention rather than the physiotherapy - when in fact this cannot be determined. An unconfounded comparison would compare psychological intervention alone versus x or psychological intervention + x versus x i.e in the latter what does the psychological intervention add to the 'usual care'. Clarification/justification or change is needed.

Response from authors:

Thanks to have brought this point to our attention. We added in page 12 under the section “Data synthesis” that we aim to compare psychological intervention alone vs. each retained comparators as well as psychological intervention + standardized physiotherapy program vs. each retained comparators.

Comment #3:

Have the method of sample size calculation is unusual - it would be helpful to explain why this is being done

Response from authors

As you mentioned, since sample size calculation is unusual, we have removed this point.

Comment #4:

They should mention inclusion of published studies only as a limitation of the review.

Response from authors:

This point was added in the discussion section.

Other modifications made by the authors:

Three authors instead of two and one trained research assistant will be involved in data extraction and assessment of bias. They will work independently in team of two. Four authors will be involved in the quality of the evidence assessment. They will also work in team of two. We decided to involve more individuals in data extraction as well as in assessment of bias and evidence quality to decrease the workload related to the systematic review and to accelerate data analysis.

Details related to these changes can be found under the section “Data synthesis”, “Assessment of reporting biases” and “Quality of evidence”.