Pulled from the streets: Quest narratives among young men with violently-acquired spinal cord injuries

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Overarching Research Objective: Examine day-to-day experiences for adolescents and young adults (AYA) with a spinal cord injury (SCI) and their caregivers (CGs) to understand relationships among participation, identity, development, and wellness.

Analytic Question: What factors influence the experiences of AYAs who acquire SCIs through violence and their CGs as they transition to community life after injury?

Analytic Framework: Frank's organizational framework for narratives from Frank imagined, and actions are negotiated causes, but data from AYAs with injuries from violence emerged as exceptionally

Background: Acts of violence, primarily gunshots, are the third leading cause of SCIs in the United States. While acute rehabilitation for SCIs from gunshots may not

Research Design and Methods

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for coding in Nvivo. Data were analyzed categorically, thematically, and narratively within- and across-cases to

Phase I: Participants

AYAs with a SCI
Aged 16-22 years
High school or lower
Mechanisms of injury: violence, fall, stroke, sport
Time injured: 4 weeks – 4.5 years

Phase I: Interviews

Individual Interviews (2-4 per AYA: 1-3 per GC)
Activity Observation (1-2 per AYA)

Phase II:

Data collection in progress

Phase II: Interviews

(2 for AYAs; 2 for CGs)

Phase III:

(1-2 per AYA)

This preliminary analysis focuses on Phase I data.

Implications: For these AYAs with violently-acquired SCIs, rehabilitation was a type of moral endeavor, complicated by functional abilities and social influences. Where some AYAs were positively engaged in caring for their own body, these devastating injuries were sometimes understood to be a chance to start fresh, to re-create one's identity, and in doing so, to live a safer and more meaningful life. Notably, within this small sample of AYAs with violently-acquired spinal cord injuries, there were strong patterns resembling quest narratives impacted by embodied knowledge, social and physical spaces, and sense of self or identity. However, a lack of experience and support relating to future ambitions (e.g. self-care, work) and the dynamics of space was evident in the midst of critical developmental periods. AYAs with fewer resources to create or maintain changes to which they were oriented.

In narrative analysis, the arcs of a storyline can indicate how experiences are internalized and acted upon. Since SCIs often result in chronic disability, restitution narratives may disrupt action and development, and chaos narratives exist in states of unrest. Therefore, considerations of how quest narratives are cultivated and supported can have important implications for application in care and community environments. Quest narratives may be acted on to generate productive action towards desired purposes and goals, however, it is critical to consider the fluidity and fragility of storylines, particularly for individuals with limited resources.

Findings

Narrative Arcs Revealed

AYA3: "My PT calls me the O.G.A.T... And he pushes me, and... I don't really even open up with people. And like I feel the connection with him... He knows how bad I want to succeed, and he helps me with it. So, he's a great motivator."

AYA1: "They make everything so difficult for you when you try to do it the right way."

Social and Cultural Spaces: In vulnerable states of being after SCI, social communities had a significant effect on individual identities, actions, and hopes or goals. Many AYAs with violently-acquired SCIs found little consistent support among their social milieu. As a result of these injuries, there was a significant difference in experiences of these participants from those with non-violent injuries and/or no history of street life. AYAs with violently-acquired SCIs also felt stigmatized and appeared to receive less support from their communities.

AYA1: "The friends that I have now... see that I'm still the same person. And some people just see me as like - I wouldn't say like sorry for me, like they don't want to see me this way or something. But just one or two people stayed down with me."

AYA4: "I'm supposed to be your 'brother,' and you're not even - like he didn't even call me since I met him. And speaking about his son before his SCI, these devastating injuries were sometimes understood to be a chance to start fresh, to re-create one's identity, and in doing so, to live a safer and more meaningful life. Notably, within this small sample of AYAs with violently-acquired spinal cord injuries, there were strong patterns resembling quest narratives impacted by embodied knowledge, social and physical spaces, and sense of self or identity. However, a lack of experience and support relating to future ambitions (e.g. self-care, work) and the dynamics of space was evident in the midst of critical developmental periods. AYAs with fewer resources to create or maintain changes to which they were oriented.

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