A Qualitative Synthesis of Narrative Research in Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation

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The collection of results generated strong evidence for implications of SCI, which further demanded the need for rehabilitative care to affect identity and engagement in daily life. Although individual experiences after SCI were variably described, this synthesis revealed the potential of a SCI to significantly shift one’s position, perspectives, and priorities in life.

Through iterative analysis within- and across-studies, themes were developed and organized into the categories below.

Methods

To facilitate an informed and nuanced description of individual experiences after a SCI, and to understand how personal experiences can guide the organization, usability, and acceptability of rehabilitation services, a qualitative synthesis of narrative research in SCI rehabilitation was completed with a method informed by the work of Thomas and Harden, as well as by Walsh and Downie. The methods were divided into four stages:

Stage 1: Literature Search

Four electronic databases (PubMed, PsycInfo, Web of Science, and CINAHL) were used to locate existing narrative research related to SCI and rehabilitation.

Stage 2: Individual Categorical and Thematic Analysis

Publications were individually examined for a descriptive analysis of participants, research questions, and methods in the collection; primary themes of the original research were noted.

Stage 3: Translation of Themes

Publications were re-organized to evaluate themes within a framework of overarching categories where concepts were tested.

Stage 4: Development of Analytic Themes

The collection of publications were examined as a whole to generate meta themes beyond the original findings.

Literature Search

Overview of Data

- PubMed: 32
- PsycInfo: 41
- Web of Science: 37
- CINAHL: 25

Stage 1

1. Identified the search terms: SCI narrative, qualitative, life experiences, participant description, identity, and contextual factors
2. Conducted an initial search to locate existing narrative research
3. Evaluated studies to organize themes
4. Established categories

Stage 2

Identified the stage 1 publications: A Qualitative Synthesis of Narrative Research in Spinal Cord Injury Rehabilitation

Stage 3

Using the identified themes, the stage 2 publications were re-organized to evaluate themes within a framework of overarching categories where concepts were tested.

Stage 4

The collection of results generated strong evidence for implications of SCI, which further demanded the need for rehabilitative care to affect identity and engagement in daily life. Although individual experiences after SCI were variably described, this synthesis revealed the potential of a SCI to significantly shift one’s position, perspectives, and priorities in life.

The collection of narratives and overarching themes illustrate the value of narrative data for research and intervention development for individuals with a SCI.

- Beyond motor and sensory dysfunctions, rehabilitation services must address psychosocial implications that result from a SCI, including a changed sense of self and disrupted relationships.
- Rehabilitation needs for individuals with a SCI extend beyond traditional models of health care. The physical body, abilities, and psychosocial sequelae evolve with time.
- Narratives from individuals with a SCI are a powerful tool for generating new insights about real people in real lives.