The Social Consequences for Older People of Neuropathic Pain: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

**Introduction.** Neuropathic pain is a common problem in later life. It remains relatively refractory to treatment and in terms of social consequences may be particularly problematic for older people.

**Objective.** This study set out to explore the lived experiences of older people with neuropathic pain, in particular their social experiences and those of their partners/spouses.

**Design.** A qualitative approach was chosen, using semi-structured interviews. Sixteen people over the age of 60, who attended pain clinics, were interviewed in their homes. All interviews were audiotaped and the analysis was based on an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach.

**Results.** The study identified that a combination of pain-related limitations and uncertainties resulted in the social withdrawal of patients, and social isolation for both patients and their spouses. The findings illustrate the processes by which this occurs in this group of patients.

**Conclusions.** The study raises important questions concerning the relationship between neuropathic pain, its physical and emotional consequences and social outcomes. The results highlight the importance of viewing neuropathic pain as a social phenomenon in which treatment and management should pay closer attention to the interpersonal and social needs and quality of life outcomes for the spouse or partner and family as well as the patient.

**Keywords:** Social, Chronic Pain, Elderly, Quality of Life, Neuropathic, Qualitative Research
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