Associated between Illness Representations and Health-Related Quality of Life in Injured Adults: A Brief Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy Early Intervention

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Recovery and health-related quality of life (HRQoL) following injury can be predicted by illness perceptions regarding injury. Psychological interventions targeting illness perceptions have facilitated HRQoL in other medical conditions but no published research has evaluated such interventions regarding mild to moderate injury. In the present study, a brief cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) early intervention targeting illness perceptions was developed and was predicted to improve HRQoL. Participants were 28 adults injured within the past 6 months who had consequently experienced limitation from participating in physical activities such as running, strenuous sports, or lifting heavy objects. They completed measures of quality of life (SF-12), illness representations (Illness Perceptions Questionnaire Revised, IPQR) and mental health symptoms (Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale). Participants were allocated to either a control or treatment group. Treatment involved two sessions of CBT intended to facilitate helpful illness representations. Control participants received standard medical care. It was found that the Identity perceptions predicted physical health, and that Consequences and Emotional Representations predicted mental health. Treatment participants reported a trend to greater improvement in personal control over their injury than the control group at post-treatment. Moreover, following intervention, treatment participants’ depression and stress scores had improved from mildly elevated to within normal limits. Finally, the treatment group reported improved physical health following the intervention, to a significantly greater extent than control group improvements. These findings suggest that a brief manualized CBT intervention can assist individuals who have sustained a mild to moderate injury to improve recovery from injury and HRQoL.

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