

Women's experience of the journey to chronic widespread pain – A qualitative study

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Conclusion

The women in the study described how their journey to CWP was influenced by both external and internal strains.

This study highlights the complexity of individual pain progress and argues for the importance of person-centred care approaches and rehabilitation programs.

The fact that women with CWP feel mistrust from healthcare professionals indicates that the current care approach needs to be changed.

Background

The prevalence of CWP in the general population is approximately 10%, and the condition is almost twice as prevalent in women, than in men. Increased understanding of how women with CWP describe their pain journey and pain progress would be of importance when preventing poor pain prognosis, and when customizing the treatment strategy in a setting with person-centered care.

Objectives

To explore experiences of factors influencing the progress and severity of pain among women who have developed CWP within the last 21 years.

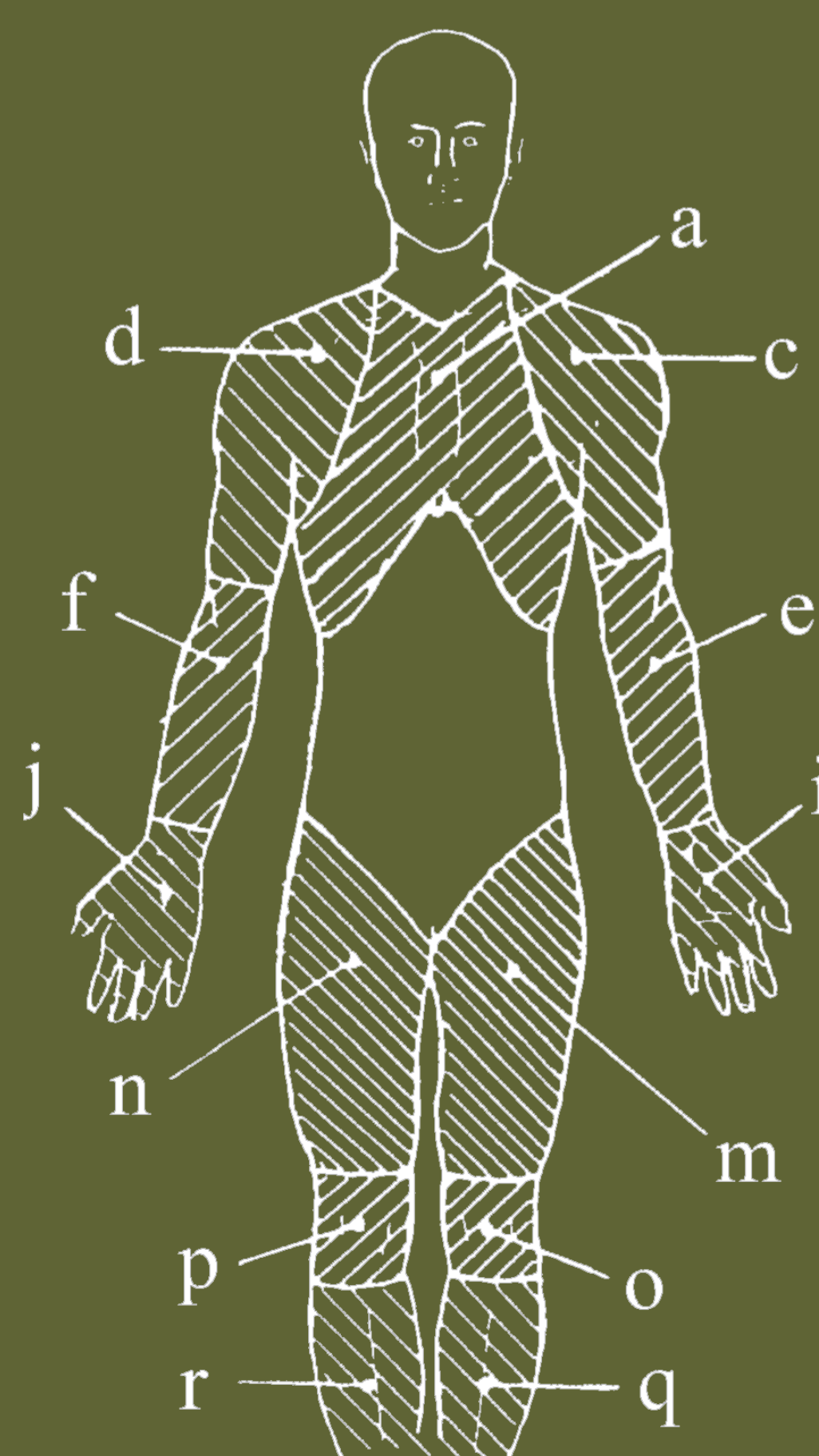
Methods

Nineteen women, 45-67 years of age, who had reported CWP in a survey 2016, but not in a survey 1995, were included in the study. Individual interviews were conducted, using open-ended questions: "Can you describe how your CWP has developed over the last 20 years?", "How did your CWP change over time?" and "Have you experienced any important events that have influenced the development of your CWP?"

The interviews were analyzed with a qualitative content analysis.

Table 1. Socio-demographic and clinical characteristics of the women (n=19) with CWP

| Characteristics | Women (n=19) |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Age Median (Range) | 57 (45-67) |
| Pain sites Median (Range) | 8 (4-16) |
| Educational level | |
| Primary school | 2 |
| Secondary school | 12 |
| University | 5 |
| Employment | |
| Working full or part time | 13 |
| Sick-leave | 3 |
| Retired | 3 |
| Civil status | |
| Married/cohabited | 14 |
| Single | 5 |



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Results

The pain journey was explained in terms of triggering, aggravating and consolidating factors, out of which six different categories emerged.

- *Physical strain* included strenuous physical activities in leisure time, having muscle tension, inactivity or sleeping problems.
- *Emotional strain* included being depressed, worried and stressed, as well as neglecting the pain.
- *Social strain* included to prioritize other people before oneself and to meet distrust from the social surroundings.
- *Work-related strain* included heavy, monotonous and stressful work but also sedentary work.
- *Biological strain* referred to heredity, age and infections.
- *Environmental strain* meant that the climate or weather affected the pain.

See Figure 1.

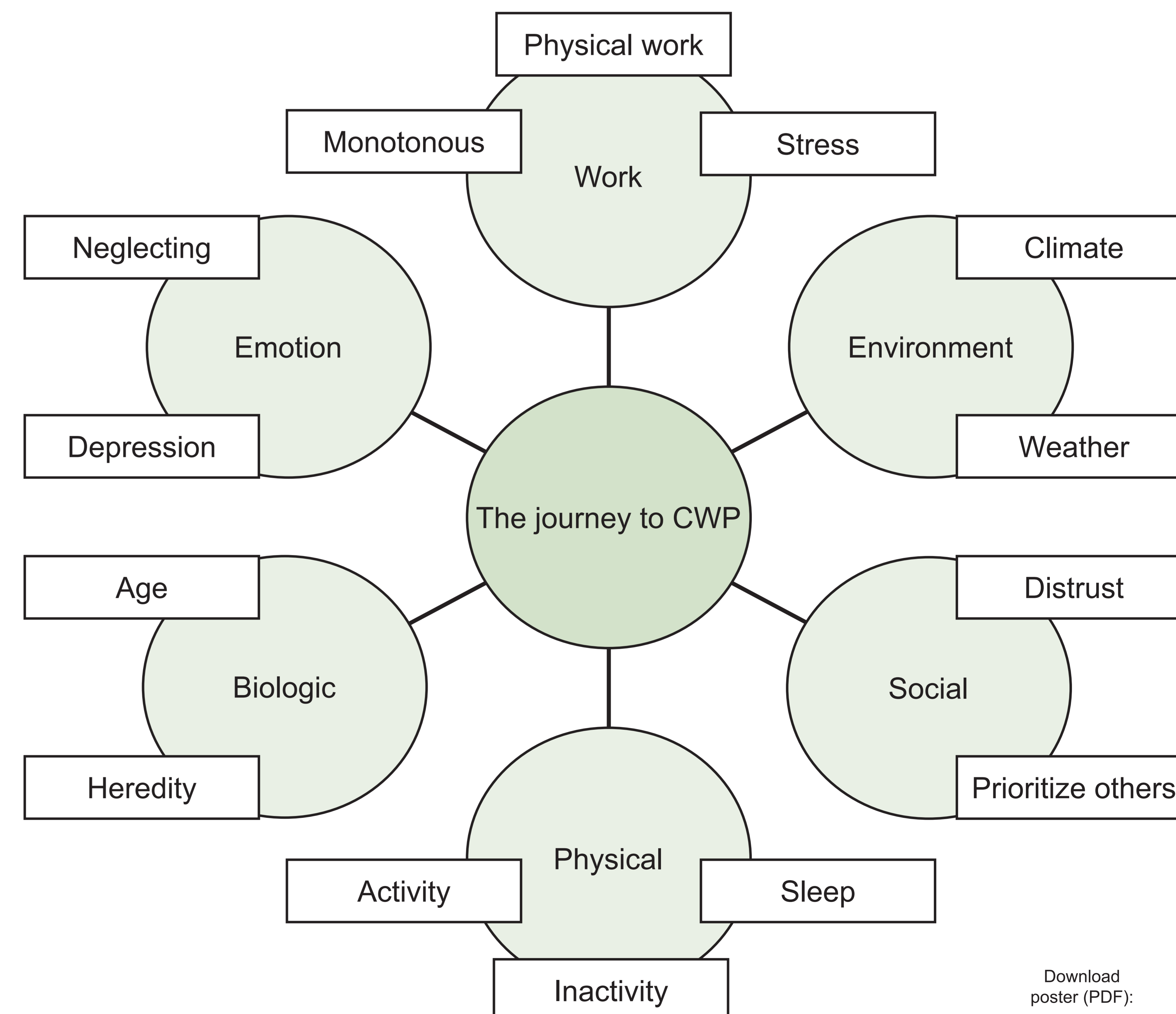


Figure 1. The pain journey was explained by six different categories.

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