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Body awareness in relation to physical activity in persons with rheumatic pain- A qualitative research study

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Introduction: Persons with long-term pain not only suffer from the physical aspects but also from emotional pain (1) in which the persons feel alienated from the things that once had meaning in their life (2). Participation in daily physical activities has been associated with several health benefits (3); however, a high level of self-rated rheumatic pain is associated with increased fear-avoidance behavior to physical activity (4).

Objective: The objective is to gain a deeper understanding of body awareness in relation to physical activity in persons with rheumatic pain. Method: Karlsson's (5) Empirical Phenomenological Psychological method was employed using a semi-structured interview guide. Eleven informants (8 females and 3 males, age range 44-71 years) diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis or psoriasis arthritis participated. During the last week of the study, the participants were administered a self-report visual analog scale measuring rheumatic pain (mean=60).

Findings: Some general characteristics emerged. This had to do with experiencing the body in transformation. Physical activities often had to be thoroughly planned, demanding a long recovery period because of increased bodily pain after the activity. Sadness, anger or fear emerged owing to a weak physical presence. Not being able to participate unhampered in everyday activities often led to feelings of confinement and isolation. Involvement in a greater context, support to discover new and creative solutions to daily activities altered the individual's feelings of hope and inner strength.

Conclusions: Because awareness is often towards the unfavorable body, a supportive, non-judgmental full person-centered attitude is crucial for the person's wellbeing.

***Ethical approval** was obtained from the ethics committee of the Regional Ethical Review Board in Stockholm, Sweden.

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