Quality of Life Experienced by Military Burn Survivors

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Introduction: There are few studies that examine the quality of life (QOL) of patients after burn center discharge over time, and no studies report longitudinal QOL and satisfaction with life (SWL) scores among military burn survivors. The purpose of this study was to examine QOL and SWL as experienced by military burn survivors over time.

Methods: Seventy-eight participants were enrolled in this descriptive longitudinal study at the time of discharge. Data were gathered at 5 time points: burn center discharge; 3, 6, 12, and 18 months post-discharge. The Burn Specific Health Scale-A (BSHS-A) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale were used; participants also completed demographic and clinical history forms. There were 14 attritions over 18 months due to participants’ relocation or the desire to no longer participate in the study. Data were analyzed using measures of central tendency, correlations, and one-way analysis of variance. The IRB approved this study.

Results: The participants were primarily male (n=76), Army (74%), enlisted service members (96%) with an average age of 25 years; they had served in the military for an average of 62 months (median = 42 months). Most were Caucasian (69%), had at least a high school education or GED (56%) with an annual income of $40,000 or less (78%); 46% were single and 45% were married. They presented with thermal burns and polytrauma resulting from combat injuries and accidents with a mean total body surface area burned = 24% (median = 17%); average length of stay in the burn unit was 44 days (median =17 days). QOL was significantly improved from burn center discharge to all other time points, with scores ranging from 244.6 to 282.4 (P≤ .011-.0001) of a possible score of 320 on the BSHS-A. There was most fluctuation among physical subscale scores during the 18 months post-burn. However, there were no significant changes in SWL over 18 months; scores remained relatively stable ranging from 24.3 at discharge to 25.3 at 18 months. BSHS-A and SWL scores were significantly correlated at all time points (p≤ .0001).

Conclusions: These patients were relatively young and in good physical health prior to sustaining a burn injury. Participants’ QOL scores improved significantly from the time of discharge over 18 months but did not improve between time points after 3 months. SWL remained stable with scores slightly above a neutral rating. This was a convenience sample; therefore, results cannot be generalized to all burn patients, but they do support the value of obtaining QOL data to determine patients’ subjective rating of their QOL and SWL over time.

Applicability of Research to Practice: Understanding burn patients’ QOL allows for aspects of burn rehabilitation to be tailored to their needs, thereby promoting improved QOL and SWL over time.

Grant Information: This study was funded by the TriService Nursing Research Program to Dr. Linda Yoder.