PAIN EXPERIENCES OF MEN AND WOMEN AFTER CARDIAC SURGERY

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INTRODUCTION / AIM

Background: Differences in the functional recovery between men and women after cardiac surgery remains a concern, and there are preliminary findings of sex differences related to both acute and persistent postoperative pain.

Aims. To compare the prevalence and severity of pain in men and women during the first year following cardiac surgery, and to examine the predictors of persistent postoperative pain at 12 months.

METHODS

This study was a secondary data analysis of a randomized controlled trial in which, 416 men and women scheduled for elective coronary artery bypass graft and/or valve surgery were recruited from two separate cardiothoracic surgical units in Oslo University Hospital in Norway from 2012 to 2013. Data about pain characteristics were collected across postoperative day 1 to 4 in hospital, then at two weeks, and one, three, six and 12 months following cardiac surgery.

RESULTS

Twenty-nine percent (n=337) of participants reported persistent, non-anginal postoperative pain at rest at 12 months, and pain was worse in intensity and in interference for women compared to men in the first year following surgery. For both sexes, a more severe comorbidity profile, lower education, and postoperative pain at rest at one month post-surgery was associated with an increased probability for persistent postoperative pain at 12 months. Beliefs that hindered communication about seeking help for pain, and a lower consumption of analgesics in hospital, increased the probability of persistent pain for women.

DISCUSSION / CONCLUSIONS

Women reported greater pain intensity and interference compared to men during the first year following cardiac surgery, and for both men and women, pain at one month increased the probability of persistent pain at 12 months. Results suggest that further research to examine interventions to assist men and women better manage their pain one month after surgery are needed, and these interventions need to consider that women have different needs for support and information about pain and pain management following cardiac surgery compared to men.

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