Health beliefs and low back pain (LBP): a comparison study of health beliefs in individuals with/without symptoms of LBP who attend an occupational health department for management advice

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ABSTRACT

Background: Health beliefs are known to play an important part of the management of low back pain (LBP) and a biopsychosocial approach has been advocated for many years and adopted within the Occupational Health setting. It is unclear however as to whether there is a difference in health beliefs in different populations attending Occupational Health Departments (OHDs) and if innovative educational programmes are required to promote positive beliefs.

Objectives: To establish if there is a difference in LBP health beliefs between employees who attended an Occupational Heath Department (OHD) for advice on the management of LBP, and those who attended an OHD for reasons 'other than LBP', i.e. not related to LBP.

Methods: Questionnaire based case referent study of NHS workers who attended the OHD (following referral by their managers) 01/05/2007 to 30/04/2008.

Main outcome measures: Outcome measures included scores for inevitability beliefs, treatment beliefs, work attribution beliefs, individual attribution beliefs, fear avoidance beliefs for physical activity and fear avoidance belief for work.

Results: There was a low response rate of 19.9%. There was no statistically significant difference in inevitability beliefs, treatment beliefs, work attribution beliefs, individual attribution beliefs and fear avoidance beliefs for physical activity between individuals attending for OHD advice on LBP and those attending for unrelated reasons ($p$ values 0.17, 0.40, 0.30, 0.42, 0.96 retrospectively). There was a difference in fear avoidance beliefs (FABs) for work score in the back pain group ($p=0.02$).

Conclusion: Due to the low response rate it is difficult to draw strong conclusions from this study. The similarity in health beliefs between patients with LBP and reasons 'other than LBP' demonstrated in this study may have resulted from the societal information and no influence from the OHD. The study would benefit from repetition with a prospective recruitment method.