Living with the Ilizarov frame was better than expected


What are adolescents’ anticipated and actual experiences of living with an Ilizarov frame?

**MAIN FINDINGS**

3 main themes emerged from preoperative interviews, and 6 themes emerged postoperatively. Before application of the frame, participants anticipated an *all encompassing impact* that would affect their normal daily activities, social relationships, and future plans. Despite a feeling of putting one’s life on hold, participants identified *coping resources and strategies* including assistance from family and peers. One of the main coping strategies was self resignation, which indicated acceptance of the frame to achieve a desired outcome and recognition of the need to get used to it. A third theme, *treatment expectations*, included feeling prepared for surgery, length of treatment, and pain. 6 themes were identified after application of the frame: *actuality of experience; coping and getting on; concerns, feelings, and reactions; support for coping; advice and recommendations; and treatment experiences. The strongest theme, actuality of experience, showed that pain was manageable after the first month and adaptation to the frame occurred. Coping and getting on was more positive than anticipated, which promoted a sense of self confidence. Advice and recommendations had 2 dimensions: advice to other adolescents and advice to health professionals. Other adolescents were advised to proceed with the treatment and told that they would be OK. Professionals were advised of the importance of preoperative teaching and listening sensitively to patients.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The main themes identified by adolescents before application of an Ilizarov frame were anticipation of an all encompassing impact, coping strategies including self resignation, and certain treatment expectations. Postoperatively, they indicated that the frame was not as unmanageable or painful as expected.

**METHODS**

Psychometric tests explored body image, depression, and coping responses. Semistructured interviews were administered preoperatively, 6 months postoperatively, and 1 month after frame removal. Interview questions, derived from a pre-study focus group, related to participants’ perceptions of their daily experiences of living with the Ilizarov frame. Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a thematic categorical approach. Themes were reviewed with participants for accuracy.

**PARTICIPANTS**

15 adolescents (11–18 y, 60% boys) who were having planned application of an Ilizarov frame within 12 months. Adolescents being managed with the frame for acute traumatic injury and those with severe learning difficulties were excluded.

**SETTING**

A children’s hospital and children’s homes in Liverpool, UK.

**DESIGN**

Qualitative study with psychometric testing.

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