Conclusions/Clinical implications

To understand potential suffering related to perceived phantom phenomena, i.e. phantom pain and/or sensations, only the knowledge about the neurobiological mechanisms underlying the intensity of pain or the phantom sensations will never be sufficient. Rather, it is necessary to capture the meaning of the phenomena in relation to the patients’ experience of the amputation as an event inflicting identity-changing processes and everyday consequences.

In line with a bio-psycho-socio-cultural approach, the present study indicated that to be able to understand a patient’s suffering, it is important to recognize that the patients are both psychological and social-cultural entities except for the biological part.

Qualitative research is necessary for better understanding of psycho-socio-cultural aspects of pain and suffering.

Results

In the post-amputation phase 22 out of 28 interviewees experienced phantom pain and/or sensations in their lost body part. Of, these, 20 ascribed the same properties to the missing body part as to the intact part concerning size, shape and posture (corporeal awareness). No association between described suffering and reported intensity of phantom pain was found but the interviewees’ repeated descriptions of their corporeal awareness made it possible to understand their losses that in turn could contribute to the individual suffering. The socio-cultural factors of clinical importance that were uncovered were:

- The lost body part. All interviewees narrated about the lost body part, its physical function or its significance for their sense of personal integrity (identity) while ten of them narrated about both.
- The context in which the interviewees were informed about amputation decision appeared essential in many ways.
- Life changing consequences in the everyday life. All interviewees described the consequences of their amputation as life-changing: changes in living conditions, the need for rehabilitation and social support. The elder individuals and those early retired, described a real worsening of their life.
- Emotional reactions and handling strategies. Almost all interviewees described their attitudes towards the disruption of their life situation (adaptation or challenge), including their emotional reactions (acceptance, reassurance, sorrow, depression, guilt or even rebellion) and their different strategies to handle the new situation in order to make the situation comprehensible, manageable and meaningful.

References


