

Background

The overall aim of this qualitative study was to explore patients' experiences, including signs, symptoms and impacts, of five vascular conditions on health related quality of life (HRQoL). The findings were used to help inform the selection and development of Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMs) for vascular patients. Five common vascular conditions were chosen as the focus of the research; Peripheral Arterial Disease (PAD), Carotid Arterial Disease (CAD), Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA), Varicose Veins (VV) and Venous Leg Ulcers (VLU).

Methods

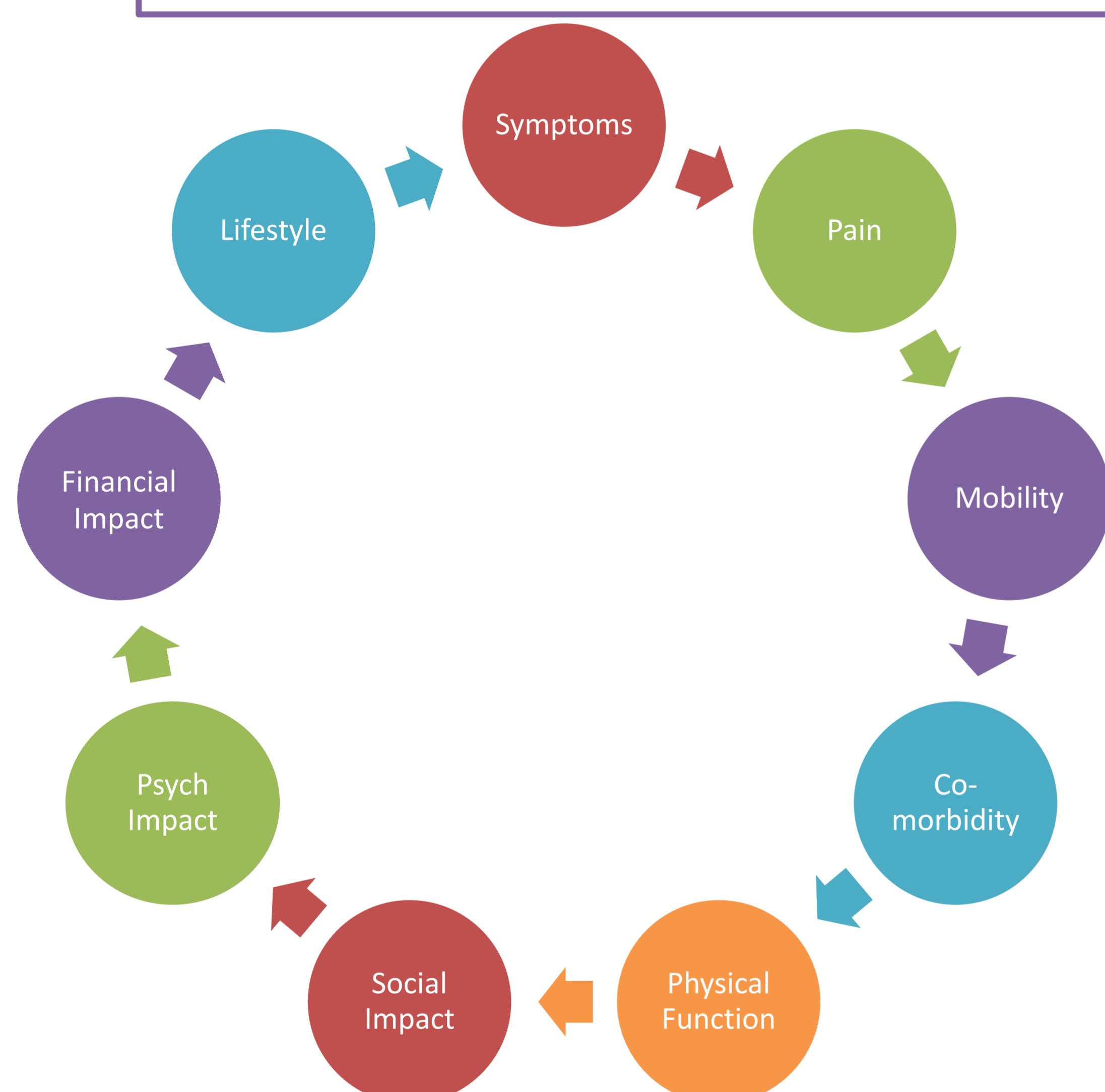
A qualitative approach was chosen as it provides the best means of understanding patients' experiences of living with a vascular condition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with patients from each of the condition groups. Framework analysis was used to analyse the interviews and create a framework of common themes.

Results

- Between 2015-2016 111 patients were approached in vascular outpatients clinics in a large teaching hospital in the north of England.
- 55 patients (49.5% response rate) agreed to participate.
- Interviews were conducted with patients from all five conditions - PAD = 14, AAA = 13, CAD = 9, VLU = 10, VV = 10.

Themes Identified

Nine overarching themes were identified – the table below shows the themes mapped across the five conditions. Some themes, such as pain, were reported across all five conditions; however the extent and nature of patient experience differed. Participants with PAD reported the most variety and range of impacts compared to the other conditions. For those with AAA and VV the mapping highlighted a clustering within the psychological, rather than physical, domains.



Map of symptoms and HRQoL concepts reported across conditions.

Symptoms	PAD	AAA	CAD	VV	VLU
No symptoms		x	x		
Pain	x	x	x	x	x
Neck pain			x		
Leg pain	x	x	x	x	x
Abdominal pain	x	x			
Arm pain	x				
Cramp/aching	x	x		x	x
Burning sensation					x
Pain severity	x	x	x	x	x
Pain on walking	x	x		x	x
Pain at rest	x			x	
Pain when standing				x	x
Mobility	x	x	x	x	x
Distance	x	x		x	x
Speed	x	x			
Stairs/ slopes	x	x			
Non-healing wounds	x				x
Co-morbidities	x	x	x		x
Progression of symptoms	x	x		x	x
Sleep	x		x	x	x
Swelling			x	x	
Loss of balance			x		
Confusion			x		
Impact on physical functioning					
Hobbies	x			x	x
Exercise	x	x		x	x
Daily activities	x				x
Social impact					
Travel	x	x	x		
Social activities	x	x		x	x
Social support	x	x	x		
Psychological impact					
Anxiety	x	x	x	x	x
Depression	x	x			x
Feelings of loss	x			x	x
Health expectations	x	x	x	x	x
Unusually appearance				x	
Feeling self-conscious	x			x	x
Fear of worsening symptoms	x	x	x	x	x
Fear of rupture death		x			
Fear of amputation				x	x
Fear of stroke			x		

Further Research

- Findings indicate an overlap in experiences of vascular conditions.
- There are also clear differences in impact on HRQoL for each condition.
- It may be possible to develop a PROM for use across a range of vascular conditions,
- It would also need to include condition specific items to capture the full impact of each condition.
- The findings from this study highlight the importance of qualitative research in PROM development as it includes important patient nuances that would otherwise be missed using quantitative methods.

Discussion

- Unique study taking a broader perspective, and exploring the impact and experience of five vascular conditions together.
- Key aspect highlighted was that participants were often unable to live their usual lives and undertake typical activities such as shopping, housework, gardening or sports activities.
- Participants reported 'adapting' the way they lived their lives to keep physical or social activities going.
- This finding is echoed in other studies and has variously been described as 'adaptation', 'adjustment' and 'coping strategies'.
- Striking psychological impact, many spoke of living with 'constant worry' - demonstrates the hidden impact of vascular disease.
- Using qualitative methods offered a deeper insight into patient experience.
- Qualitative interviews highlighted descriptions of participants adapting their lives to avoid symptom impact – this would not be captured by current PROMs or questionnaires.
- If PROMs do not collect this information then patients are missing out on reporting key impacts of their condition.

Conclusion

This study provides a unique overview of patient experience of five vascular conditions. It maps the symptoms and impact on HRQoL across the conditions, and allowed for the similarities, and differences, to be explored. The apparent overlap in symptoms and impact indicates there may be a place for a PROM that can be used across a range of vascular conditions. It provides a starting point for further research in this area.

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