

# How can a brief intervention contribute to coping with back pain? A focus group study about participants' experiences

**Brief back- and neck pain intervention with non-directive communication of a non-injury model reduces sick leave, but little is known about why it is perceived as helpful by the participants**

## The Non-injury model

- ❖ The back is a strong structure
- ❖ Pain is not a sign of injury caused by inappropriate behavior
- ❖ Being in normal activity, including staying at work, provides the best prognosis

## Aim

To explore how individuals, who had participated in a brief back- and neck pain intervention based on non-directive communication of a non-injury model for back pain, perceived connections between the intervention and their subsequent coping

## Design

- ❖ Focus group study
- ❖ Three focus groups with a total of ten employees (three men and seven women aged 20-67 years) who
  - ❖ Had participated in a brief back- and neck pain intervention (informational course for 2-3 hours)
  - ❖ Perceived the intervention as helpful
  - ❖ Had returned to or remained at work subsequent to the intervention
- ❖ Systematic text condensation was used for analysis (Malterud, 2012)

## Non-directive communication

- ❖ The information is provided in a non-directive way
- ❖ Participants are not given advice, but offered insight and understanding to make their own decisions
- ❖ Allowing the participants to draw their own conclusions of what the information means to them

## Results

Three main categories related to how and why the participants considered the intervention as helpful was revealed:

### Lecturers perceived as trustworthy and as experts, delivered the information in a comprehensible way

- ❖ Use of practical examples, metaphors, and images of the spine
- ❖ The significance of perceiving the lecturers as trustworthy and as expertise on back pain was revealed

"I got the impression that it was said with.... that the lecturer had great professional expertise and knew what she was talking about"  
 (Woman, health care apprentice, 20 years)

### Understanding the pain enhanced the participants confidence in using their bodies without fear

- ❖ Knowing why they felt pain and that it was not a sign of a serious disease, changed the participants perception of how they could live with it

"I think that might be the reason why the course worked out so nicely, because you previously were so worried, and then you got a very straightforward explanation"  
 (Woman, teacher, 35 years)

### Exceeding previous limits and doing things they never dared before provided benefit and space in everyday life

- ❖ Pushed themselves
  - ❖ It was possible to do more than they thought was possible
- ❖ Did completely new things
  - ❖ At work, e.g.: lift patients, bend freely
  - ❖ In the spare time, e.g.: running, swimming,
  - ❖ weight-lifting, walks, playing with the children

"Previously I was not able to do anything. Nothing. But now – I grit my teeth in order to get up. I must get up, even if I would need someone to help me"  
 (Woman, auxiliary nurse, 44 years)

## CONCLUSION

**Information delivered in a comprehensible way, by health professionals perceived as trustworthy experts, helped participants to cope with their pain and was perceived as the most important aspects of the brief back- and neck pain intervention**