Pain Quality Descriptors in Persons with Limb Loss

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**Purpose:** To describe and document pain quality descriptors in persons with limb loss.

**Background:**

Phantom limb pain is very common, and its pain quality descriptors give insight to the lived experience of phantom limb pain.

**Significance:**

This study reports unique phantom limb pain quality descriptor categories.

**Research Methods:**

This is a secondary analysis of an existing data set. The original instrument included open-ended interview to assess phantom limb pain quality descriptors. Data were analyzed for emerging categories of phantom limb pain descriptors.

**Results:**

Two emerging categories were:
- Different pain quality descriptors in different missing limbs
- Different pain quality descriptors in different locations within the same missing limb

**Exemplar:**

Upper extremities: “Aching”
Lower extremities: “Sharp, vulturous pain, electricity”

**Demographics:**

The sample demographics were mean age 52.3 years, mean education level 14.0 years, male 71.2%, and race/ethnicities were White 67.3%, Black 23.1%, Latino 1.9%, Native American 1.9%, and mixed 3.8%.

**Implications:**

Phantom limb pain quality descriptors may vary by location within and among missing limbs. Nurses can incorporate this into pain assessment methods of research and practice.

Funded by the Jody DeMeyer Endowment