ITALIAN OSTEOPATHS’ ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ABOUT SPINAL IMAGING IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC LOW BACK PAIN: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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BACKGROUND

Chronic low back pain (CLBP) is one of the leading causes of disability worldwide, incidence and related healthcare costs are constantly increasing.

Spinal imaging studies have limited clinical utility in the management of this condition and their overuse can lead to negative effects on patients.

Clinicians’ and patients’ misconceptions seem to be one of the most important drivers of such abuse. However, there is a lack of research investigating osteopaths’ ideas and thoughts on spinal imaging studies and on how these could guide the management of a patient with persistent pain.

OBJECTIVES

To explore Italian osteopaths’ attitudes and beliefs towards spinal imaging studies and their utilization in the clinical evaluation and management of patients with CLBP.

To enlarge knowledge of osteopathic clinical reasoning and management of chronic pain patients providing useful suggestions for the educational field.

METHODS

A qualitative study was conducted with elements of grounded theory.

By sending a poster to the major Italian osteopathic schools, a purposive sample of 14 professional osteopaths (Table 1) that respected the following inclusion criteria was recruited: completion of the studies, minimum five years of experience and at least two days a week of clinical practice.

Data were collected until real saturation through semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim and coded by using thematic analysis.

Full data saturation along with thick descriptions, member checking, memo writing and peer de-briefing ensure the trustworthiness of this study.

RESULTS

Overview of themes and subthemes

CONCLUSION

These findings could have implications for both osteopathic practitioners and educators especially considering the current historical moment for osteopathy in Italy, the need to build a unique and shared professional identity and the rising interest on psychosocial factors in musculoskeletal practice.

This is the first study that explored osteopaths’ attitudes and beliefs towards imaging. We have to consider that osteopaths not involved in the educational field and with different levels of clinical experience may be less aware of the topic and show different views (possible recruitment bias).

Further research is required to explore findings’ transferability to the whole professional category (in Italy and in other countries) and to several clinical conditions.

REFERENCES:


Table 1: Participants’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>4 females and 10 males</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YEARS OF PRACTICE</td>
<td>Average: 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range: 7-28</td>
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<tr>
<td>WORK EXPERIENCES</td>
<td>Freelance (n = 14)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecturer at an osteopathic educational institution (n = 13)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clinic tutor at an osteopathic clinic (n = 11)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Osteopathic researcher (n = 10)</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND</td>
<td>Diploma in Osteopathy (n = 14)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bachelor of Science in Osteopathy (n = 10)</td>
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<td>Master of Science in Osteopathy (n = 5)</td>
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<td>PgCert in Education (n = 9)</td>
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<td>PgCert in Pain Management (n = 3)</td>
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Table: Overview of themes and subthemes

- CLINICAL RELEVANCE AND UTILITY
  - Reason for consultation
  - Spinal imaging overuse
  - Negative effects of patients
  - Influence on clinical decision making and management

- TOOL TO INTERACT WITH PATIENTS
  - Need to reassure and educate patients
  - Importance of language and therapeutic alliance

- PROCESS OF CLINICAL EVALUATION AND MANAGEMENT
  - Patient interview and the role of PS factors
  - CPS evaluation and management
  - Osteopathic training and scope of practice
  - Role of hands-on approach
  - Self-management and multidisciplinary care

Therapeutic alliance as a cornerstone of care

Reconceptualization of osteopathic approach

Imaging in the management of CLBP: More harm than good?