COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND EXERCISING: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY WITH 1156 FIBROMYALGIA PATIENTS

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BACKGROUND

Fibromyalgia (FM) is a disease of difficult treatment. According to EULAR recommendations, physical exercise is the only therapeutic approach with positive strong evidence. Social isolation due to COVID-19 pandemic could affect undertaking this recommendation. The aim of this study was to analyze the pandemic effects in the exercising practice and impact of the disease in patients with FM.

METHODS

An internet questionnaire was answered by 1156 women with FM diagnosis. Questions were on epidemiology, social distancing habits, exercise practice before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, including subtypes of exercises (for resistance, flexibility, balance, and strength). The fibromyalgia impact questionnaire (FIQ) was also applied.

RESULTS

In the whole sample, 57.7% of individuals practiced exercises before the pandemic; during pandemic only 34.8% (39.6% left this practice). Among those taking quarantine ($n = 440$), 52.9% used to do exercises prior to the pandemic; in the pandemic, 28.1% (reduction of 53.2%). The median FIQ among those who practiced exercises in the pandemic was 73.6 (61.1–83.2); and in those who did not was 80.4 (71.9–86.9), with $p < 0.0001$. The FIQ did not change according to the type of physical exercise ($p = 0.27$).

CONCLUSION

A high proportion of FM patients stopped exercising during the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the disease during this period was worse among those not practicing physical exercises.

KEYWORDS

Fibromyalgia, COVID-19, Pandemic, Physical activity, Quality of life.