

# Costs of Fibromyalgia

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## ABSTRACT

### BACKGROUND

This study explored the feasibility of using an Internet survey of people with fibromyalgia (FM), to develop a better view of the true cost of fibromyalgia to the many individuals who suffer from this pain syndrome.

### METHODS

An Internet questionnaire, conducted by a FMS community organization, AFFTER (Advocates for Fibromyalgia Funding, Treatment, Education and Research), surveyed respondents about disruptions in employment and lifestyle brought on by symptoms of fibromyalgia. 672 people with FMS and 175 people without FMS completed the questionnaire. The measurement of cost of illness included questions on employment status, coping ability, lifestyle change, depression, cognitive disruption and exercise tolerance.

### RESULTS

Respondents were predominantly middle-aged (ages 45-55) Caucasian (90.5%) females (94.0%), with about 40% involved in online support groups. A substantial percentage of the 672 FMS respondents had stopped working due to ill health. 20% were working full time (vs. 45% controls), 32% were disabled, receiving benefits (vs. 2.4% controls), and 15% were disabled and in litigation or disability denied (vs. 0 controls). 69% of respondents with FMS reported severe interference with life style, making it difficult to cope with daily functions.

Respondents with FMS had worse mental status as indicated by depression (45% vs. 12% controls).

Respondents with FMS had reduced tolerance for exercise. 39% had regular to occasional difficulty walking, 88% could not run, 58% had occasional to severe difficulty with water aerobics, 63% could not engage in land aerobics, 78% had occasional to severe difficulty lifting weights and 48% could not swim.

### CONCLUSIONS

Fibromyalgia imposes incalculable personal, emotional, and economic costs on the individual in the form of lost productivity, mental impairment, role limitations, and disruptions in life style. The study showed that 47% of individuals who were productively employed left their job due to ill health. Fibromyalgia is a debilitating illness that can affect almost every aspect of one's life.

## INTRODUCTION

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition that results in great social and economic impact on the affected person. The costs of illness are both direct and intangible and influence a range of actions and decisions concerning employment, lifestyle, and mood. All these costs are important in identifying modifiable cost factors that contribute to the overall burden of fibromyalgia.

Wolfe et al. in Arthritis and Rheumatism (1997) reported that fibromyalgia patients have high lifetime and current rates of utilization of all types of medical services. They reported that FMS patients have more symptoms and comorbid conditions than patients with other rheumatic conditions, and symptom-reporting was linked to service utilization, functional disability and global disease severity.

In a study by Bernard et al. in Arthritis Care and Research (2000), fibromyalgia patients ranked their past quality of life as 8.6 and present quality of life as 4.8 on a visual analog scale, 1-10. The authors found that effective coping strategies included talking to friends, praying, exercise, hobbies, relaxation techniques, talking to a professional, and meditation. Patients reported needing more support, better-educated health professionals, for people to believe that this disease exists, more funding for research, and better diagnostic tools.

## PURPOSE

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## METHODS

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Respondents were predominantly middle-aged (ages 45-55) Caucasian (90.5%) females (94.0%), with about 40% involved in on-line support groups. A substantial percentage of the 672 FMS respondents had stopped working due to ill health. 20% were working full time (vs. 45% controls), 32% were disabled, receiving benefits (vs. 2.4% controls), and 15% were disabled and in litigation or disability denied (vs. 0 controls: Table 1). 69% of respondents with FMS reported severe interference with life style, making it difficult to cope with daily functions.

The respondent's mood was often affected by the stress of the illness. Respondents with FMS had worse mental status as indicated by depression (45% vs. 12% controls).

Respondents with FMS had reduced tolerance for exercise. 39% had regular to occasional difficulty walking, 88% could not run, 58% had occasional to severe difficulty with water aerobics, 63% could not engage in land aerobics, 78% had occasional to severe difficulty lifting weights and 48% could not swim.

TABLE 1. EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

	Fibromyalgia n=672	Controls n=175
Working full time	20.0%	45.1%***
Working part time	12.4%	18.4%*
Unemployed and seeking employment	2.4%	2.3%
Unemployed and not seeking employment	4.4%	4.0%
Retired by choice	4.4%	11.5%***
Retired not by choice	4.7%	2.3%
Disabled and receiving disability benefits	32.0%	2.4%***
Disabled and disability benefits pending, in litigation	7.6%	0.0%***
Disabled and disability denied	7.4%	0.0%***

\*p<0.05

\*\*p<0.01

\*\*\*p<0.001

## CONCLUSIONS

**Fibromyalgia imposes incalculable personal, emotional, and economic costs on the individual in the form of lost productivity, mental impairment, role limitations, and disruptions in life style. More than two thirds of individuals with fibromyalgia reported marked changes in their lives.**

**Forty seven percent of individuals who were productively employed left their job due to ill health.**

**Reduced exercise capacity was present in the majority of fibromyalgia cases, and is often a marker of deconditioning. Depression affected 45% of the sample, more than three times greater than in controls. Fibromyalgia is a debilitating illness that can affect almost every aspect of one's life. Both the tangible and intangible burdens should be considered in the management plan of fibromyalgia patient.**