

Exploring the Sources of Recovery Expectations in Rehabilitation: A Study Protocol for a Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies

INPLASY2025100026
doi: 10.37766/inplasy2025.10.0026
Received: 8 October 2025
Published: 8 October 2025

Carrière, JS; Coutu, M-F; Royer, M-P; Phan, F; Alpdogan, NY; Benallal, L; Montemurro, L; Durand, M-J.

Corresponding author:
Junie Carrière

junie.carriere@usherbrooke.ca

Author Affiliation:
Université de Sherbrooke.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - Institut de recherche Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail (IRSST) ET Réseau provincial de recherche en adaptation-réadaptation (REPAR).

Review Stage at time of this submission - Formal screening of search results against eligibility criteria.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY2025100026

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 8 October 2025 and was last updated on 8 October 2025.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective The objective of this study is to provide the first systematic review of key themes and concepts identified from qualitative investigations as sources of recovery expectations in the context of rehabilitation following musculoskeletal pain conditions.

Rationale Research in occupational rehabilitation has supported the view that recovery expectations play an important role in the experience of pain and disability consequent to musculoskeletal pain conditions. Recovery expectations are potentially modifiable, although at this point, they are still poorly understood. Exploring the sources of recovery expectations will inform future interventions and help prevent prolonged recovery trajectories. Our current understanding of the

sources of recovery expectations in the context of rehabilitation is limited and remains a significant barrier to the development of effective expectancy-change interventions. To date, much of the research on recovery expectations has been grounded in quantitative methods, which, while valuable, often fail to capture the nuanced and multifaceted experiences of individuals undergoing rehabilitation for musculoskeletal pain. Qualitative studies provide an important complement to quantitative findings, offering rich insights into the complex interplay of personal, social, and contextual factors that shape recovery expectations. Despite this potential, no systematic review has yet synthesized the available qualitative evidence. Addressing this gap is critical to deepening our understanding of recovery expectations and to informing the design of more effective, patient-centered interventions.

Condition being studied Musculoskeletal pain conditions.

METHODS

Search strategy The electronic databases PubMed, PsychInfo, and the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews will be searched using the terms/concepts (“expectation”, “expectancy”, “belief”) and (“recovery” or “work”) and (“pain” or “injury”) and (“qualitative” or “interview” or “focus group”) from inception to September 2025. No additional studies will be identified through assessment of reviews. All citations will be imported into EndNote, and duplicates will be removed. Two reviewers will independently read the titles and abstracts of the manuscripts identified by the search strategy to determine their eligibility according to the inclusion criteria. Abstracts included by either reviewer will undergo full-text review. Studies that do not directly measure recovery expectations (e.g., health beliefs) will be excluded from this review. Full-text articles of the remaining citations will be retrieved and assessed for inclusion by the same two authors using the same criteria. Disagreements will be resolved through discussion with a third author, if necessary.

Participant or population Studies will be selected if they met the following inclusion criteria based on title and abstract: 1) involved participants over 18 years of age; 2) participants reported pain conditions; 3) published in the English language; 4) reported a qualitative data on sources of recovery expectations.

Intervention N/A.

Comparator N/A.

Study designs to be included Qualitative.

Eligibility criteria Studies that did not directly measure recovery expectations (e.g., health beliefs) will be excluded from this review.

Information sources Electronic databases and grey literature.

Main outcome(s) Sources of recovery expectations.

Data management All references will be managed in EndNote for deduplication. Screening will be conducted independently by two reviewers using Rayyan, with inclusion/exclusion decisions and reasons logged in the software. Data extraction will

be performed in a standardized Word sheet stored on a secure institutional drive with version control. Extracted qualitative findings will be imported into Atlas.ti for qualitative data management and coding during thematic synthesis.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis

Quality assessment will be performed using the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence public health guidance checklist. This grid will conform to the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) for the publication of qualitative articles. This evaluation process will be used to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the selected articles. Manuscripts will not be excluded on the basis of their quality.

Strategy of data synthesis A combined deductive and inductive thematic analysis will be conducted, following the approach described by Miles et al. (2014). A preliminary set of codes will be developed a priori, based on the existing literature on factors influencing recovery expectations. These codes, along with their definitions, will be compiled into a codebook that will be refined iteratively to include additional codes emerging from the data. In this study, codes will be defined as themes arising from a segment of text (Miles et al., 2014).

All citations relevant to sources of recovery expectations will be extracted independently by two coders. Each coder will extract citations and their surrounding context from half of the included articles. A discussion will then be held to verify agreement on each extraction. Both coders will code the extracted material independently for each article. After every two articles, the coders will meet to compare results, resolve discrepancies, and reach consensus on code application. In cases where consensus cannot be achieved, a senior researcher will be consulted. The codebook will be revised as necessary during these discussions, and codes with overlapping definitions will be merged.

The resulting codes will then be organized within the four systems of the Work Disability Paradigm (Loisel et al., 2001). Flexibility will be maintained to preserve the richness and contextual meaning of the data. If codes cannot be adequately represented within existing subsystems, they will remain outside of this structure.

Subgroup analysis N/A.

Sensitivity analysis Sensitivity analyses will be conducted to assess the robustness of the findings. Specifically, we will examine whether the exclusion of lower-quality studies (as determined

by the NICE checklist) alters the thematic structure. We will also compare themes across different study designs and populations (e.g., acute vs. chronic musculoskeletal pain) to explore potential variability. These sensitivity analyses will ensure that the final synthesis reflects stable and transferable themes rather than artifacts of study quality, methodology, or reviewer interpretation.

Language restriction English only.

Country(ies) involved Canada.

Keywords Recovery expectations; sources; determinants; qualitative; musculoskeletal pain.

Dissemination plans The findings of this systematic review will be disseminated through multiple channels to maximize their reach and impact. A manuscript reporting the results will be submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal relevant to rehabilitation, musculoskeletal pain, and qualitative research. Results will also be presented at national and international scientific conferences in the fields of rehabilitation, pain management, and health services research.

To facilitate knowledge translation, summaries of key findings will be prepared for non-academic audiences, including clinicians, policy-makers, and patient organizations. These will take the form of plain-language summaries, infographics, and/or short reports, which will be shared through institutional websites, professional networks, and social media platforms.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Junie Carrière.

Email: junie.carriere@usherbrooke.ca

Author 2 - Marie-France Coutu.

Author 3 - Marie-Pier Royer.

Author 4 - Frédéric Phan.

Author 5 - Naz Alpdogan.

Author 6 - Larbi Benallal.

Author 7 - Laury Montemurro.

Author 8 - Marie-José Durand.