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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - None.

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

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY202650005

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 1 May 2026 and was last updated on 1 May 2026.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective The objective of this systematic review is to identify the elements of dissociation present for sufferers of chronic health & illness. This will present the necessary elements, symptoms, and experiences of dissociation that should be considered when treating those with chronic health & illness.

Research Question #1: What, if any, is the presence of dissociation like amongst those suffering from chronic illness?

Research Question #2: Assuming a presence of dissociation, how does this interact with the experience of chronic illness?

Research Question #3: What frameworks have been proposed to help patients understand their dissociation?

Rationale The rationale is that concerns over embodiment within chronic illness at a philosophical level might suggest experiences that

mimic dissociative symptoms. If this is taken to be possible, it would suggest that the typical experience of oneself as a whole self, a sense of ipseity, is disrupted. If that is an experience that those with chronic illness do have, we are interested to identify possible manifestations. For instance, research has already been conducted by others to investigate the correlations between chronic illness mindsets and comorbid or worsening psychiatric symptoms. Meaning that the way one relates to their illness has ramifications. This phenomenological thinking of interrelations between elements might apply further to those with chronic illness. In the case for this protocol, it would be to see whether the disruption they experience is more-so similar to the decreased interoceptive experiences and attunement with one's physical body that those with dissociative disorders experience. Given that the connections are conceptual in nature, the hope of this systematic review is to identify what research currently exists that could point to possible manifestations of disrupted embodiment in chronic illness.

Condition being studied The condition being studied is chronic illness as defined by American Disability Act of 1990. We will rely on their reporting of conditions when selecting articles. We are selecting chronic illness in part because it.

METHODS

Search strategy We will use boolean searches using the keywords (dissociation x chronic illness, dissociation x chronic disease, dissociative x chronic illness, dissociative x chronic disease) within the databases PsycINFO, PubMed, JSTOR, CINAHL and grey literature to identify articles.

Participant or population We will be selecting participants with chronic illnesses that experientially involve an element of needing to adjust how one imagines their future with their body.

Intervention Not applicable.

Comparator Not applicable.

Study designs to be included Quantitative and qualitative.

Eligibility criteria Studies occurring between 1980 to 2025 will be included. This start date was identified as when there began to be more research on chronic illness being conducted. Exclusion criteria includes any designs that are theoretical in nature as they could conflate experiences with the opinions of the authors. As well, studies referencing chronic pain will also be excluded. This review does not seek to reproduce the findings around somatization and dissociation within chronic pain, as this is already understood to be prevalent in clinical populations. Instead, this review seeks to look at dissociation outside the lens of somatization or an effect of psychological trauma, and more-so within the lens of embodiment.

Information sources Electronic databases and grey literature.

Main outcome(s) 1. The presence and possible descriptions of dissociative symptoms as experienced by those with chronic illness.
2. Illustrations of experiences that could be related to dissociative experiences. These will provide rationale for future studies.

Data management All data will be stored within RefWorks.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis This systematic review relies on the PRISMA format to increase transparency and robustness of searches. Quality of individual studies will be determined by a close reading of each article using the judgment of the two authors, each being licensed mental health professionals. Decisions will be cross-examined by the other to ensure elimination of bias.

Strategy of data synthesis The initial screening will be conducted based on the article titles to determine fit. If an article may or may not fit, we will turn to the abstract to provide clarification. Full articles may be read as needed to determine fit. The articles that fit the eligibility criteria will be further synthesized into more specific folders within RefWorks and duplicates will be removed. Identified articles will then be synthesized to derive themes that encapsulate the experience of dissociative symptoms in those with chronic illness.

Subgroup analysis This systematic review is looking for identification of experiences and not testing treatment effects. Therefore, we do not expect to find subgroup effects but analyses will be conducted as needed.

Sensitivity analysis Sensitivity analysis will be conducted as needed.

Language restriction English.

Country(ies) involved United States.

Keywords dissociation; dissociative; chronic illness; chronic disease.

Dissemination plans The dissemination plan is an academic work to be published first as a preprint and later within a peer-reviewed journal.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Jeremy Cooper - Author 1 was involved in planning and designing the review, identification of PRISMA criteria, initial searches, and will be involved in the screening and thematization of findings, as well as the formal writing once completed.

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Author 2 - Courtney Bowser - Author 2 was involved in planning and designing the review, identification of PRISMA criteria, initial searches, and will be involved in the screening and thematization of findings, as well as the formal writing once completed.