

From Pelvic Radiation to Social Isolation

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COLO-SPIRIT

COLorectal Symptoms after Pelvic RadIoTherapy



Introduction:

Pelvic radiation can cause chronic bowel symptoms including urgency, frequency, bleeding and incontinence. Symptoms can arise months or years after radiotherapy, persist long-term and decrease quality of life (Andreyev et al 2011). This qualitative study explored the impact of bowel symptoms on the lives of cancer survivors following pelvic radiation.

Methods:

- Semi-structured interviews with 28 survivors of prostate and gynaecological cancers, experiencing chronic bowel symptoms, recruited through UK cancer charities and hospitals (50% female; age range 34-82 years.).

Analysis:

Reflexive thematic analysis led to 4 themes describing a process (Fig 1):

- Losing Control** of bowels.
- Embarrassment and Fear** of losing control in public.
- Managing and Reacting** to prevent or contain leakage.
- Restriction of place/time/activity and Withdrawal** from social situations.

We applied these themes to experiences in the workplace (Fig 2).

Figure 1: Four themes describing a process leading to social isolation

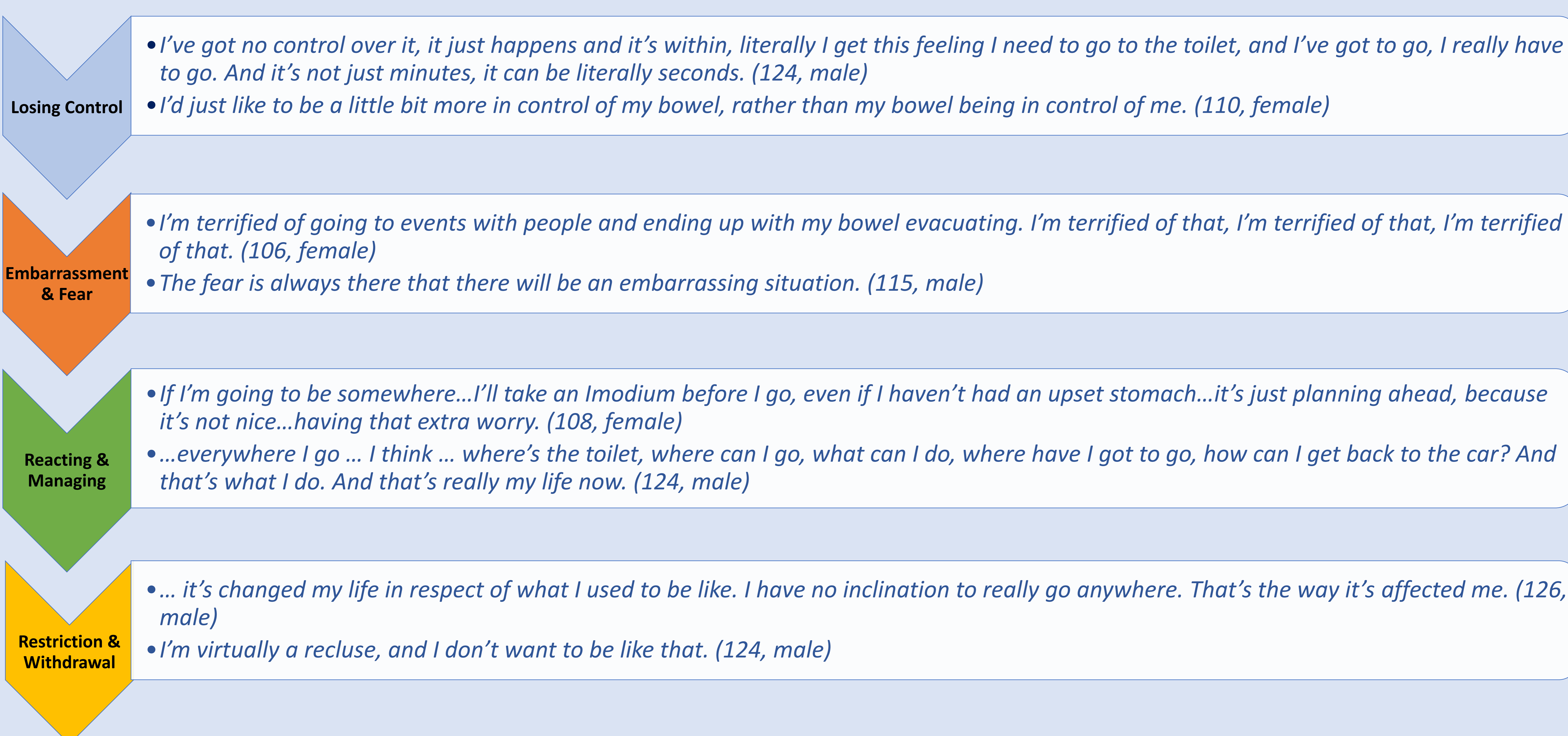
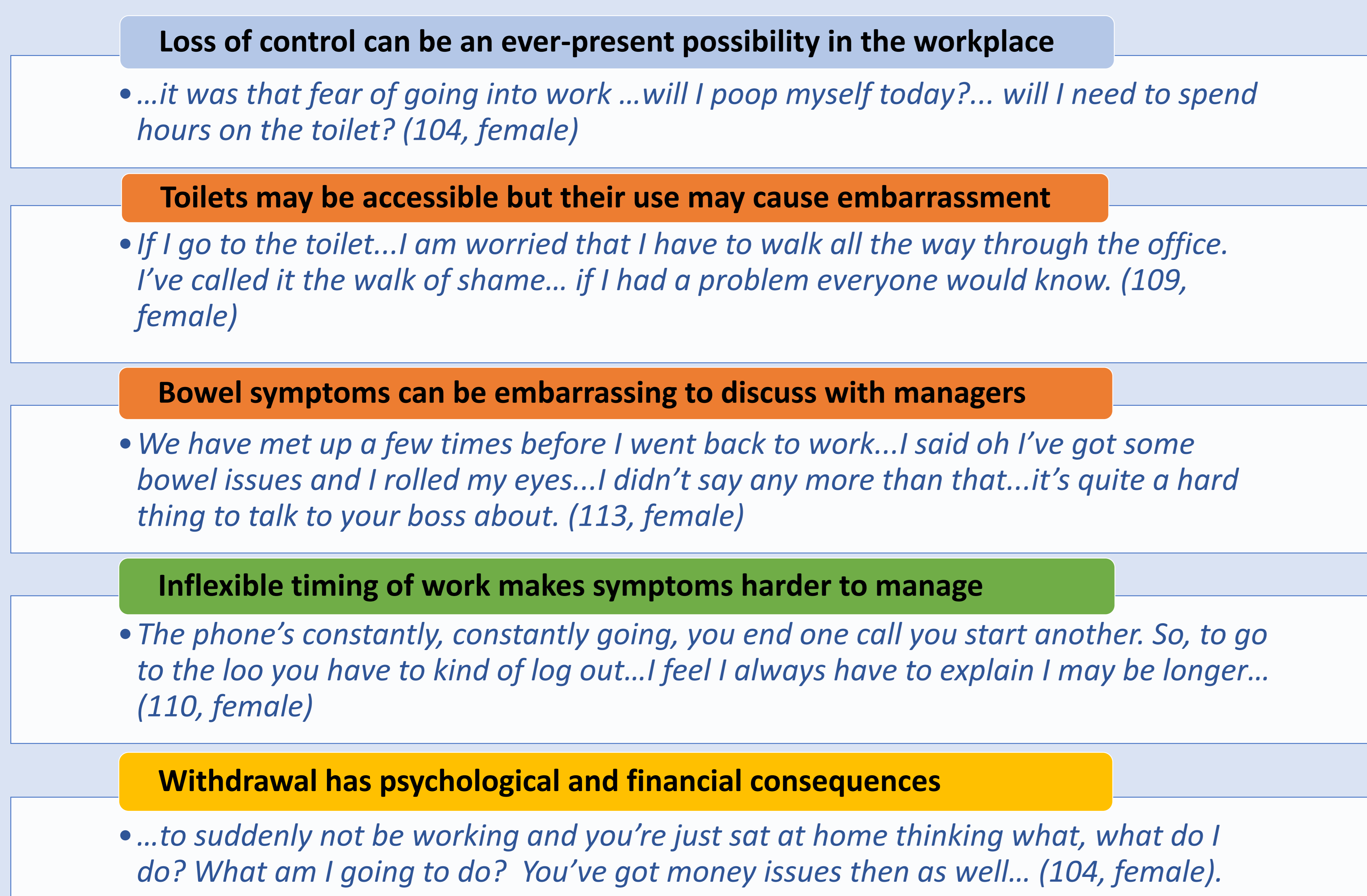


Figure 2: Applying the themes to describe experiences in the workplace



Conclusions:

- Chronic bowel symptoms have a major impact on survivors' lives. Symptoms can prevent a return to pre-treatment roles and bring psychological and financial consequences.
- Symptoms can lead to restrictions and social withdrawal.
- The complex needs of survivors in the workplace may not be sufficiently recognised.

References:

Andreyev HJ, Wotherspoon A, Denham JW, Hauer-Jensen M. "Pelvic radiation disease": new understanding and new solutions for a new disease in the era of cancer survivorship. *Scand J Gastroenterol.* 2011;46(4):389-97.

Acknowledgements:

Steering Group: Anthony Cunliffe, Lisa Durrant, John Hancock, Helen Ludlow and Ian Pedley.

The COLO-SPIRIT study was funded through an unrestricted project grant from 3D-Matrix