Background: Fatigue in AS, has been found to impact on functioning and quality of life. To date no Irish studies have been performed assessing the impact of fatigue on activity participation, thus the main aim of this study was to explore experiences of fatigue and how it impacts on activity participation in an Irish cohort of patients with AS.

Methods: Ethical approval was received from the Tallaght/St James’s Hospital research ethic committee. A mixed methods design was employed. The quantitative measures used were the Frenchay Activities Index (FAI), Fatigue Severity Scale (FSS), Multidimensional Assessment of Fatigue (MAF), Bath AS Disease Activity Index (BASDAI), Bath AS Functional Index (BASFI), Total Pain Numeric Rating Scale (NRS) and the AS Quality of Life questionnaire (ASQoL). The qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews to explore in depth personal perspectives of fatigue in AS.

Results: Informed consent to participate was received from 50 patients with a definite diagnosis of AS who then completed questionnaires. According to the Multidimensional Assessment of Fatigue (MAF) measure, significantly high fatigue levels (a score of over 21 out of 50) were found in 38% of participants in the study. Activity levels were high with a mean score of 31.86 out of 45 (S.D. 7.14) in the Frenchay Activities Index (FAI). Lowest activity participation levels were found in the leisure/work category with a mean score of 9.68 out of 15 (S.D. 3.11). Mann Whitey U statistical analysis revealed significant differences ($P < 0.05$) between MAF scores (over and under 21) in activity participation ($P = 0.008$), disease activity ($P = 0.000$), functional ability ($P = 0.015$), total pain ($P = 0.001$) and quality of life ($P = 0.000$). Interviews found that disrupted sleep due to pain causes fatigue. Concentration in work, energy levels and motivation to engage in social activities were all affected by fatigue. Strategies helpful in managing fatigue included sleeping when possible, having a sleep routine and keeping active. It was reported that health professionals do not address fatigue management and that it was often a minor topic in written information.

Conclusion: This study stresses that fatigue has a notable impact on disease activity, pain, quality of life and participation in work and leisure activities. More input is required from health professionals to assist with education on sleep hygiene and fatigue management.
Disclosure statement: The authors have declared no conflicts of interest.