Understanding the Experience of Stroke and the Client Identified Factors of a Successful Recovery

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Abstract

Researchers utilized a qualitative methodology and completed semi-structured interviews to better understand the lived experience of stroke survivors. The current study’s sample included seven participants. After completing a thorough analysis of the interviews, three main themes were identified and included stroke survivors’ definition of a successful recovery, the personal meaning of the stroke experience, and factors that aid in their recovery. The overall meaning of the stroke experience was a successful recovery. A successful recovery for participants was defined in terms of one’s physical recovery and the ability to participate in meaningful occupations. Instrumental factors to a successful recovery included the presence of an external support system, internal motivation, faith, self-reliance, and an aspect of self-awareness. Two underlying themes surfaced as participants considered the meaning of their stroke experience: a greater respect for one’s self and others and willingness to help others discover inner strengths.

Methods

Target Population

Stroke survivors

Inclusion

At least two years post-stroke

Exclusion

Participants who demonstrated global aphasia

Study Design

Qualitative methodology and phenomenological approach

Participants

Seven participants

Procedure

Recruitment through use of flyers

Data Analysis

Thematic Coding

Inclusion

At least two years post-stroke

Exclusion

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Thematic Coding

Findings

Data analysis identified three thematic categories that were further analyzed with additional sub-themes identified.

Introduction

Despite physical recovery and quality of rehabilitation, some stroke survivors are not successfully re-engaging in the community. occupational therapists better understand what stroke survivors view as successful recovery, and the factors that aid in this process, they can develop client-centered interventions that support long-term engagement in chosen occupations. The purpose of this study was to identify what the stroke survivor considers successful recovery and what factors would assist in this recovery.

Research Questions:

1. What do stroke survivors identify as successful community recovery and participation?
2. What factors do stroke survivors identify as being instrumental in their recovery?

Findings

“Faith and family—there’s the two keys…”

“Being around other stroke patients gave me courage and strength… It was about us working together and supporting each other and helping each other through this thing.”

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“Physical recovery = Meaningful occupations”

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References


Discussion

The current study explored the meaning of a successful recovery and identified influential factors that aided stroke survivors in this process. Previous studies have explored the re-engagement of stroke survivors, specifically barriers to re-engagement and the effects of stroke on life satisfaction. The current study focused on discovering the personal perspectives of participants including what they considered to be a successful recovery, the instrumental factors that aided in this process, and the personal meaning of the experience.

As expected, participants in the current study identified physical recovery, including improvement in gait and use of affected extremities, as a critical aspect of a successful recovery. When asked to identify influential factors in the recovery process, participants in the current study recognized the presence of an external support system, internal motivation, faith, self-reliance, and an aspect of self-awareness as aiding the recovery process. These factors were a combination of both internal and external factors. A study conducted by Jones, Mandy, and Partridge (2008) similarly identified internal factors of optimism, internal strength, and control over one’s recovery as positive personal influences affecting their participants. Jones, Mandy, and Partridge (2008) and the current study validate the need to address these internal factors and personal characteristics during therapy as they could help facilitate a more successful reintegration of stroke survivors. By gaining an understanding of a client’s unique personality and how they approach adversity, an occupational therapist could help integrate those characteristics into therapy.

Identifying the meaning of being a stroke survivor was an important step in the recovery process. Participants discovered a positive aspect of their recovery as having the opportunity to explore one’s inner strengths. Gillen (2005) interviewed stroke survivors in an effort to see if they were able to identify any positive consequences of their stroke. Individuals observed positive aspects to include increased social relationships, increased health awareness, change in religious life, personal growth, and altruism (Gillen, 2005). The current study highlights the commitment between the therapist and stroke survivor, an area not explored within rehabilitation literature. In the current study, participants two believed he had an obligation, or responsibility, to work hard for his therapist. He was committed to his therapy because he believed he had a responsibility to put forth his best effort for the therapist, as he knew she was doing the same for him.

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