

Psychological Intervention for Partners Post-Stroke: A Case Study

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Abstract : Background and Aims: Relationship breakdown is typical when one partner lives with an acquired brain injury caused by issues like a stroke. Research has found that the perception of relationship satisfaction decreases following such an injury among non-injured partners. Non-injured partners also are found to experience caregiver stress/burden as they immediately have to take the role of a caregiver along with being a partner of the injured. Research has also found that the perception of a continuous relationship, i.e. the perception of the relationship to be essentially the same as it was before the injury, also changes among those caregiving partners. However, there is a lack of available intervention strategies that can help those partners with both individual and relationship difficulties. The aim of this case study was to conduct a pilot test of an intervention aimed to explore whether it is possible to support a partner to experience greater continuity within the relationship poststroke, and what benefits such a change might have. Method: A couple, where one partner experienced an acquired brain injury poststroke were provided with Integrated Behavioural Couples Therapy for 3-months. The intervention addressed goals identified as necessary by the couple and by the formulation of their individual and relationship difficulties, alongside the goal of promoting relationship continuity. Before and after measures were taken using a battery of six questionnaires to evaluate changes in perceptions of continuity, stress, and other aspects of the relationship. Results: Both quantitative and qualitative data showed that relationship continuity was improved after the therapy, as were the measures of stress and other aspects of the relationship. The stress felt by the person with the acquired brain injury also showed some evidence of improvement. Conclusion: The study found that perceptions of relationship continuity can be improved by therapy and that improving these might have a beneficial impact on the stress felt by the carer, their satisfaction with the relationship and overall levels of conflict and closeness within the relationship. The study suggested the value of further research on enhancing perceptions of continuity in the relationship after an acquired brain injury. Currently, the findings of the study have been used to develop a pilot feasibility study to collect substantive evidence on the impact of the intervention on the couples and assess its feasibility and acceptability, which will help in further developing a specific generalized relationship continuity intervention, that will be beneficial in preventing relationship breakdown in the future.

Keywords : acquired brain injury, couples therapy, relationship continuity, stroke

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