

Navigating the "Neglected Outcome": A Qualitative Exploration of Cognitive Changes and Daily Adjustment Among South African Stroke Survivors

Setlhare B.O¹, Lentoor, A.G¹, & Peer, N²

1. Department of Clinical Psychology, School of Medicine, Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University, Ga-Rankuwa, Pretoria, South Africa
2. Non-communicable Diseases Research Unit, South African Medical Research Council, Durban and Cape Town, South Africa, Department of Medicine, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa

Abstract

Background and Objectives:

Post-stroke cognitive impairment (PSCI) remains a neglected outcome in low-resource environments, where rehabilitation often prioritise physical over cognitive and psychosocial functioning. This qualitative study explores the lived experiences of stroke survivors in the Gauteng, South Africa, focusing on how stroke survivors manage cognitive changes and adjust to daily life.

Methods:

Using an exploratory phenomenological design, 10 participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling via social medias. Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with survivors reporting cognitive difficulties at least one-year post-stroke. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software, to identify core patterns in participants' experiences.

Results:

Findings highlight the cognitive, emotional, and social sequelae of post-stroke cognitive impairment (PSCI), specifically difficulties with memory, concentration, multi-tasking activities that impair everyday functioning, social participation, and quality of life.

Conclusion:

By detailing subjective experiences, this study informs contextually appropriate rehabilitation and psychosocial interventions. The results contribute to patient-focused care and support policy development for cognitive health in South African stroke rehabilitation.

Keywords: Post-stroke cognitive impairment (PSCI), lived experience, psychosocial adjustment, low-resource settings, neurorehabilitation