Evaluating the General Public about Brain Injuries

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Introduction

Despite the prevalence of acquired brain injuries (ABI), there remain many misconceptions held by the general public about ABI. This in turn leads to a lack of resources and support to assist survivors [1]. Education of the public about the impact of ABI is essential in order to eliminate misconceptions and help survivors improve their quality of life [2].

A possible tool for educating the general public about the impact of ABI is the oral history. It can change the general public towards ABI [3]. However, preliminary investigations have revealed the need for further research in this area.

Purpose of this Investigation:

To determine if presentation method impacts ABI education of the general public.

Methods:

- **Participants**
  
  N = 448 (female = 372, male = 76)
  
  Participants either read an educational pamphlet, listened to audio interviews and/or watched a documentary video of ABI survivors. Their responses to a survey were compared with participants who received neither form of educational resource.

1. Completed the survey only.
2. Listened to the audio interview prior to completing the survey.
3. Watched the video prior to completing the survey.

- **Materials**

  A 50-item survey was developed. Participants were asked to make judgments on their amount of exposure to survivors of ABI, their attitudes about ABI, factual knowledge about ABI, and issues related to the ABI recovery process and community integration.

- **Procedures**

  Participants received notification about participation in this investigation via email and were randomly assigned to one of these groups:

  1. Complete the survey only.
  2. Read an educational pamphlet and then complete the survey.
  3. Watch a documentary video about ABI and/or listen to audio interviews of ABI survivors and then complete the survey.

- **Statistics**

  Responses to survey questions were used to determine accurate and inaccurate beliefs about the effects of ABI and the recovery process. Chi-square analysis examined differences in knowledge and beliefs between groups.

Results of Survey Responses

**Effects of and Recovery from ABI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question (Correct Response in parentheses)</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Pamphlet</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Aud/Vid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most people with an acquired brain injury look and act disabled. (F)</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>77.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Even after several weeks in a coma, when people wake up, most recognize and speak to others right away. (F)</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People with amnesia for events before the injury usually have trouble learning new things too.* (T)</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>12.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People who have had one head injury are more likely to have a second one.* (F)</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>63.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is good advice to rest and remain inactive during recovery. (F)</td>
<td>67.1</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete recovery from a severe head injury is not possible, no matter how badly the person wants to recover.** (F)</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The percent of correct responses was quite low for each group on these questions. Similar findings have been demonstrated in previous investigations [1].

**Knowledge of Community Integration Following ABI**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Statement</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Pamphlet</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Aud/Vid</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survivors of an ABI can live meaningful and productive lives.</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>96.3</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most survivors of ABI are able to return to work, school, or volunteer work.</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>85.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survivors of ABI have a higher divorce rate than individuals without ABI.</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult for survivors of ABI to develop/maintain social relationships.</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants who watched the video and listened to the audio were less likely to agree that divorce rates were higher following ABI. The participants who watched the video and listened to the audio were more likely to agree that survivors of ABI have difficulty developing/maintaining social relationships.

Discussion:

The results of this study are similar to previous findings indicating that misconceptions about ABI persevere among the general population [1]. It appears, however, that educating individuals about ABI using multiple methods, including audio and video, is an effective strategy. However, further data collection is needed before conclusions can be generalized.

The participants in this study who viewed an ABI educational documentary and/or listened to oral interviews with survivors of ABI seemed to have more realistic attitudes about community integration of survivors of ABI compared to those who used other methods of education or who received no education. It has been previously hypothesized that misconceptions about ABI are fueled by the media (e.g., movies and TV) [1]. The general public may appear to make improvements in their attitudes and beliefs about ABI when this same type of media is presented in an accurate and effective manner.

Further investigations that examine the effectiveness of various resources for educating the public about the effects of ABI are warranted.

References:


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Acknowledgment:

The Krempels Brain Injury Foundation
www.krempelsfoundation.org