Communication Partner Training: Psychosocial outcomes for care partners of Persons with Aphasia

Zoe Rosler

Introduction

- Aphasia = communication disorder that results from damage to the language centers of the brain, which lie primarily in the left hemisphere. Damage to these areas of the brain does not necessarily impact the individual’s intelligence, but can result in deficits in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.1
- Because of the challenges associated with providing care to a person with aphasia, intervention may also be provided to the care partner (CP).2

Methods & Analysis

Search for Evidence

- The search for evidence started with two similar reviews published by Simmons-Mackie et al. (2010, 2016) which defined relevant outcomes of communication partner training, both for the PWA and care partner.
- Five articles included in Simmons-Mackie et al.’s 2016 review provided direct evidence for the current research question.
- Two articles were found published since the end of Simmons-Mackie’s review period (August 2017) using the same 23 search terms.
- Two additional articles were found from a supplemental broad search of articles evaluating the intervention of CPT through databases available in the University of Delaware’s library.

Search Terms

(partner OR family OR spouse OR support team OR volunteer OR staff OR significant other OR dyad) AND (conversation OR communication OR language OR interaction OR social OR pragmatics OR relationship) AND (therapy OR treatment OR intervention OR training OR coaching OR in-service OR education) AND (aphasia).

Databases Searched

Communication & Mass Media Complete, PubMed, EBSCOhost, CINAHL, PsycINFO, Social Sciences Citation Index, and Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews

The search for evidence yielded a total of nine peer-reviewed articles that explored the psychosocial outcomes of the care partner of the person with aphasia.

Analysis:

- The outcomes of the 9 studies were analyzed according to:
  1) the specific aspects of psychosocial functioning that improved
  2) the extent to which they improved
  3) the rigor of the methodological design
- The 9 articles were stratified generally by type of outcome from CPT which included:
  (a) attitudes/enjoyment towards caregiving
  (b) confidence/knowledge/willingness to communicate
  (c) depression

Results

- Of the 9 studies that have been published since 2009, 8 studied reported some evidence for CPT improving psychosocial outcomes of the caregiver. 1-10
- In general, there was evidence that CPT was efficacious, although only one study had a control condition.
- Indeed, each study had significant methodological limitations in the design, precluding the ability to draw strong conclusions.

Methodological Threats

None of the reviewed studies used a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial.

Strong reliance on self-report measures only.

Heterogeneity of specific psychosocial outcomes (depression, confidence, etc.)

Small sample sizes

Lack of manualized, standardized procedure

Different kinds of communicative partners (e.g., nurses, spouses, healthcare professionals, student healthcare professionals, and family members)

Conclusions

The evidence that exists is generally supportive of speech-language pathologists use of CPT. However, the quality of the evidence is weak.

References


Purpose & Research Question

• The goal of this critically appraised topic is to review the evidence for the efficacy of communication partner training.

Research Question:

• For caregivers of people with aphasia, does communication partner training improve the communication partner’s psychosocial status more than no such training?2

• The definition of psychosocial status includes confidence, self-esteem, depression, and identity.2

Directions for Future Research

• There is a strong need for more methodologically rigorous studies that include more specific outcomes, and more targeted approaches for each type of communication partner.
• Interventions included in future research should be implemented in more “real world” service delivery settings.