

Social isolation after acquired brain injury: Exploring the relationship between network size, functional support, loneliness and mental health

Salas C.E.
Rojas-Libano D.
Castro O.
Cruces R.
Evans J.
Radovic D.
Arevalo-Romero C.
Torres J.
Aliaga A.

Abstract

Social isolation can be a consequence of acquired brain injury (ABI). Few studies have examined the relationship between social isolation and mental health after ABI. In this cross-sectional and case-control study, we compared 51 ABI survivors and 51 matched healthy controls on measures of social isolation (network size, social support and loneliness) mental health and mental health problems. We explored the relationship between structural, functional and subjective components of social isolation and examined whether they were associated with mental health outcomes. No group differences were found on size of the network and perceived social support. The ABI group exhibited marginally higher levels of loneliness. The ABI group presented higher levels of depression, lower levels of quality of life and emotional wellbeing. In both groups, perception of social support was inversely related to subjective experience of loneliness. The relationship between network size and loneliness was only significant in the ABI group. Only loneliness significantly predicted quality of life, emotional wellbeing, depression and anxiety in people with brain injury. The relationship between social isolation variables in ABI is discussed, as well as the theoretical and clinical implications of focusing on loneliness to improve mental health after brain injury. © 2021 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Author keywords

Brain injury; Loneliness; Mental health; Social isolation; Social network; Social support