

Research provides new understanding of emotional impact of stroke

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The physical challenges associated with recovery from a stroke are well documented however the impact of a stroke on emotion is less well understood.

New research from the University of Aberdeen, published today (October 1) in the *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* has identified key areas in which [stroke](#) can impair [emotion regulation](#) and found that these difficulties continued 18 months after the stroke.

The findings of this study have implications for the long-term treatment and recovery of [stroke patients](#) and may help pave the way to help guide treatment interventions following stroke.

Every year there are approximately 152,000 strokes in the UK, which equates to one stroke every three and a half minutes.

Dr Clare Cooper, Lecturer in Health Psychology at The University of Aberdeen, led the study, which was funded by the Chief Scientist Office. She said:

"Emotion regulation is really important for all of us - we all use it every second of every day. It is about recognising what we are feeling and what we can do to cope if we feel distressed. For example we might count to ten or rant to a friend, thereby enabling us to continue with our daily lives. Following stroke, emotion regulation may be impaired and patients may struggle to understand and cope with their own emotions. Following a stroke, patients can sometimes experience their emotions as overwhelming and feel as if their emotions are running them rather than other way round. This can seriously limit the degree to which patients are able to live their life to the fullest. "

"This study is the first of its kind to examine in detail how emotion regulation is affected by a stroke and explore how this may influence people's social participation following stroke."

Researchers interviewed stroke patients six weeks after their stroke then again at 18 months into their recovery and compared their answers to individuals who had not experienced a stroke. The volunteers were asked questions about their ability to regulate their emotions, which included questions about topics like impulsivity and emotion awareness. Patients were also asked about how much they engage in social activities such as seeing friends and family, engaging in social events and working. Results

were then analysed to find any links between emotion regulation and social participation.

Dr Cooper added:

"Our results showed that at six weeks post-stroke, patients showed impairments in emotion regulation that were related to reduced social participation compared to a control group.

"At 18months post-stroke there was still an association between the ability to regulate emotion and [social participation](#), which was apparent even when other factors such as low mood and mobility problems had been accounted for.

"These findings show that following a stroke, some patients can have long-term difficulties with [emotional](#) regulation and that this may affect their ability to participate socially. Although more research is needed we now have a clear starting point for follow-up research to better understand how emotion regulation is affected, how we might help patients cope with this, and whether this leads to a more socially active and fulfilling life. Research suggests that by giving patients strategies to recognise feelings and control emotions they can focus on recovery and eventually engage more fully with work and family."

Provided by University of Aberdeen

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