

Perceptions of Acquired Brain Injury: A Qualitative Story Completion Study

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UNIVERSITY OF
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Who we are

Dr. Laura Boubert: Chartered psychologist, Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Principal Lecturer and researcher in Cognitive Psychology at the University of Westminster.

Dr. Christopher Lloyd: Academic and counselling psychologist with interdisciplinary expertise in psychology, counselling, and theology.

Navodya Henadheera: Recent neuroscience graduate, former research assistant on a brain injury project, currently pursuing a Master's in Clinical Neuroscience.

Study aim

knowledge and narrative perceptions of acquired brain injury (ABI) between those **with and without direct experience of ABI**.

Explicit knowledge VS implicit assumptions

- False Belief Questionnaire
- Story-stem narrative task

100 Participants took part anonymously online

Theme 1: Perceived causes and consequences of ABI

External/Physical | Internal/Cognitive

he was in a car accident a while ago and suffered from physical injuries as well as emotional trauma... he couldn't leave his bed for months and needed a lot of rest to recover. Alex still suffers from some physical injuries but he is recovering now. (Non-ABI)"

"he had suffered a stroke at 32 years old ... when he began experiencing vision loss in his left eye and muscle weakness in the left side of his body. (Non-ABI)"

"had been in a car accident three years prior and now had difficulty remembering things, especially when tired. He uses his phone diary to set daily reminders as prompts and suffers from fatigue if he doesn't allow for rests during the day. (ABI)"

"he feels different to how he was before. He's often fatigued and needs breaks. He can struggle to find the right words and process information. His family say his personality has changed. He is keen to return to work and lead a normal life." (ABI)

Theme 2: Perceived Pathways to Recovery: Recovery, Adaptation, Coping, and Resilience

— External/Physical | Internal/Cognitive

“He explained... that although the recovery has been long and, at times, frustrating, the experience has made him more **resilient, organized, and self-aware.**” (Non-ABI)

he emphasized that his **long-term memory remains sharp**, which allows him to draw from years of experience and knowledge,” (Non-ABI)

“...after intense therapy by **occupational therapists, psychologists** and many other **rehabilitation** personnel, Alex was back on his feet and discharged from the hospital 3 weeks after his accident. Alex had no speech impediments but he suffers from extreme **fatigue and term memory loss**. He needs tasks to be written out and often has to ask for **clarification when multiple tasks have to be completed.**”- ABI

Theme 3: Beyond Recovery: Structural and Social Dimensions of Living with ABI

External/Physical | Internal/Cognitive

"Alex feels he is capable of going back to doing normal things in his day-to-day life; however, it is taking some time, and feels he needs to start slow and build himself up with the right guidance and atmosphere at work. He has always wanted to be in this field and is excited to get a chance for the interview."- Non-ABI

"Alex was in a coma for a year in a vegetative state. When he finally woke up, Alex no longer possessed the fine or gross motor skills he once had, nor could he talk. Due to the severity of the hit, Alex is now wheelchair-bound and requires 24-hour care." (ABI)

He'd been off work for about a year and did manage to return to his old role as a sales assistant with some adjustments to his role.
(ABI)

Conclusions

Individuals with direct experience of ABI show significantly higher knowledge, recognise invisible symptoms, and provide more holistic, socially-informed narratives compared to those without experience.

Participants without ABI experience tended to frame recovery as linear, visible, and medically confined, reflecting public misconceptions. These findings support the need for contact-based education, public awareness campaigns, and inclusive interventions to reduce stigma and enhance understanding of the complex, ongoing challenges faced by ABI survivors.

Findings highlight persistent public misconceptions about ABI, suggesting the need for education, contact-based interventions, and inclusive practices to reduce stigma and support long-term adaptation for survivors.