

ABSTRACT

From the onset of an acquired brain injury (ABI), individuals experience lifelong challenges including marginalization and barriers to holistic long-term rehabilitation support to regain their quality of life. This research project emerged from individuals with lived experience who expressed their desire to be heard in rehabilitation including Therapeutic Recreation (TR). The research question was "What are the long-term recovery needs of people living with an ABI and in what ways can TR optimize interventions to support these needs?" Using purposive and convenience sampling, four TR practitioners, with two years of work experience and seven individuals with ABI (ages 19–76) with three weeks rehabilitation, participated in semi-structured interviews; recorded and transcribed via Zoom or in person.

Data analysis revealed three themes: the lived experience of individuals with an ABI, the experience of rehabilitation, and the importance of ethical practices. First, the lived experience of ABI highlights the diverse factors shaping post-injury identity including socioeconomic status, mental health, accessing health care, and self-awareness. Second, rehabilitation emphasizes TR's effective person-centered role in fostering social connections, physical health, and emotional recovery. Third, ethical practices are critical including reflexivity, rapport building, informed consent, and collaborative decision-making, creating a safe and trusting environment.

These findings highlight the importance of involving individuals with an ABI as the experts in their recovery. Additionally, TR has a positive impact on individuals with an ABI and integrating reflexive practices, TR optimizes interventions and provides long-term community support. These results can be used to advocate for awareness and improved TR rehabilitation approaches.

RESEARCH QUESTION

"What are the long-term recovery needs of people living with an ABI and in what ways can TR optimize interventions to support these needs?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

- **The Lived Experience:** Includes lack of self-awareness, emotional dysregulation, and comorbidities such as mental health and addictions (Brain Injury Canada, 2024; Grewal et al., 2024; Panday et al., 2021).
- **Challenges:** Memory loss, executive function problems, mobility issues, and healthcare barriers (Goldman et al., 2022).
- **Recovery Needs:** Biographical repair, support for identity rebuilding, mental health, and social integration (Cutler et al., 2016; Panday et al., 2021; Wilkie et al., 2021).
- **TR:** Can enhance social, emotional, and physical well-being (Mamman et al., 2022).
- **Barriers:** Limited funding, accessibility issues, and lack of long-term support (Tsow, 2024; Leeson et al., 2023; Vestri et al., 2014).
- **Ethical Care:** Reflexive and Collaborative Practices: Build trust, ensure informed consent, and promote autonomy (Government of Canada, 2023; Shaw et al., 2020; Tsow et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODS

A Qualitative Research Study

Data Collection

- Semi-Structured Interviews 45- 1.5 Hours in Length.

Participants

- Recruitment by convenience and purposive sampling.
- 2 Groups of participants: Ages 18-76
- Seven participants with Lived Experience with Questions such as: "What were the benefits of TR interventions or rehabilitation for you?"
- Four who were TR Facilitators with questions such as: "Based on your observations, what opportunities do TR interventions give the person with an ABI to connect in their community?"

Data Analysis

- The participants' interview transcripts, and fieldnotes, together with the student researchers' personal reflections were cleaned and the data bits were coded creating these three themes: Lived Experience, Rehab and Brain Injury and Ethics in Research.



Optimizing Acquired Brain Injury Rehabilitation: The Power of Therapeutic Recreation



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RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Lived Experience of ABIs

- Identity Building & Resiliency
- Importance of Community Integration
- Physical & Emotional Impact of ABI



"If I didn't understand how [my brain] was working and what was going wrong and what was not working, I couldn't have made changes in my environment to make myself more comfortable and be able to think clearly and be able to function properly. So understanding was everything." - Angel

"The most effective interventions are the ones that follow a therapeutic process."- Ellie

"The most effective program is the one that builds independence and skill in the client"- Ellie

Experiences with TR and Rehabilitation

ABI & Rehab Experience:
Program Involvement, Structure, Effectiveness, and Benefits of TR & Rehab

Long-Term Needs & Improvements
Suggestions, Accessibility, Challenges, Resource Awareness, and Recommendations for TR & Rehab



Importance of Ethical Practices

Ethical engagement is vital and includes:

- Reflexivity
- Rapport building
- Collaborating with a person-centered approach.



"How you can do research, unless all the common brain injury symptoms are looked at... You have to have some kind of a, some kind of a... foundation or a way...give as much information about interviews to provide context to foster assurance understanding and patience." - Watson

DISCUSSION

- The need for understanding lived ABI experience and relevant factors
- Community Integration and Long-term support
- Need for ethical research practices when working with marginalized populations
- Assessment based personalized interventions or programs

CONCLUSION

- Our research provided key insights into the experiences of TR facilitators and individuals with ABI.
- Identified gaps, biases, and future research needs to enhance TR interventions.
- Highlighted the importance of long-term TR strategies for community integration and well-being.
- Emphasized the need for greater awareness and sustained community support post-rehabilitation.
- Recommended personalized, impactful interventions to improve physical, social, emotional, and cognitive outcomes.
- Findings support better, more inclusive care for individuals with ABI and their caregivers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase TR Funding** – More resources for long-term ABI support beyond rehabilitation.
- **Promote Lifelong TR Support** – Encourage ongoing participation for sustained recovery and community integration.
- **Develop Transition Programs** – Bridge the gap between rehab and daily life for smoother community reintegration.
- **Engage Stakeholders** – Collaborate with healthcare providers, governments, families, and community groups.
- **Enhance TR Education** – Raise awareness of TR's impact on ABI recovery among professionals and the public.
- **Increase access to TR** – Accessible rehabilitation in all provinces and communities, regardless of size or type.

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