

Abstract title

EXPLORING ALTERED BODY PERCEPTION AND COMFORT AFTER STROKE: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Background

After stroke, changes to body perception are common. However, little is known about what these disturbed perceptions feel like to the stroke survivor. This study took a phenomenological approach to explore stroke survivors' experiences of altered body perception, whether these perceptions were uncomfortable and whether participants indicated a need for clinical interventions.

Method

A purposive sample of 16 stroke survivors were predominantly recruited from community support groups for stroke. All participants were at least six-months post-stroke, experiencing motor and sensory impairments and able to communicate verbally. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in participants' homes. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analysed alongside reflexive notes using an interpretative phenomenological approach. Ethical approval was obtained from University of the West of England.

Results

Four themes emerged. Participants described a body which did not exist; a body hindered by strange sensations and distorted perceptions; an uncontrollable body; and a body isolated from health professionals and clinical interventions. Participants expressed discomfort and feelings of conflict toward the body. They found their experiences difficult to understand and hard to describe.

Conclusion:

Altered body perceptions left stroke survivors feeling disembodied: their bodies perceived as strange, uncooperative, uncomfortable and isolated from support. This is the first study to look at altered body perceptions in terms of patient comfort. These findings highlight the need for health professionals to recognise and support the communication of stroke survivors' experiences of altered body perceptions and discomfort. Further research is needed to determine ways communicate about body perception and develop interventions to improve body comfort.