



Vickers, C., (2010). *Social networks after the onset of aphasia: The impact of aphasia group attendance. Aphasiology, 24(6-8), 902-913.*

Background: Social networks are the context for communication and life participation and are associated with adults' health, well-being, and longevity. Compared to other populations, persons with aphasia have not been included in social network research in the US.

Aims: The study aimed to measure and compare 40 participants' social networks and frequency of contact within networks before and after aphasia. It also examined self-ratings of communication/social participation as well as perceived social isolation versus perceived social support. A further aim was to explore the impact of weekly aphasia group attendance on all variables by comparing two groups within the sample: 28 persons attending a weekly aphasia group, and 12 persons not attending an aphasia group.

Methods & Procedures: Social network interviews for social network analysis and questionnaire surveys measured the perceptions and experiences of a non-random sample of 40 persons with aphasia in the US. Measures included Social Networks Inventory (Blackstone & Hunt-Berg, 2003), The Friendship Scale (Hawthorne, 2006), and a pilot tool, The Survey of Communication and Social Participation (Vickers & Threats, 2007). Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to explore the data and compare the aphasia group attendees (N = 28) with non-attendees (N = 12).

Outcomes & Results: Results indicated shrinkage of social networks and reduced frequency of contact with partners after onset of aphasia for the entire group. Independent samples t tests revealed significantly higher levels of social participation, and significantly less perceived social isolation and greater social connection for the 28 individuals attending a weekly aphasia group.

Conclusions: A major contribution of this study is its direct inclusion of 40 individuals with aphasia in a project in the US that provided quantitative data about social networks before and after aphasia. Results confirm that clinicians should be concerned about potential reduction of social networks and social isolation after aphasia. Data also support the notion of significantly increased social participation and sense of social connectedness for those who attend aphasia groups. The findings point to the need to directly assess aphasic individuals' social networks as the context for life participation through social network analysis. It also suggests that intervention efforts in aphasia therapy would be enhanced by assessing how persons with aphasia perceive their level of social connection as well as their participation in the social environment.