

The Impact of Aphasia on Relationships: Friends' Perspectives

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Introduction

The speech-language pathologist's (SLP) role in facilitating life participation for people with aphasia (PWA) has been gaining more attention. Part of life participation is the initiation and maintenance of relationships, particularly friendships (Fig.1). PWA are at higher risk for loss of friendships due to communication barriers and a lack of community member knowledge of aphasia. By better understanding a friend's perspective, SLPs can serve a more proactive role in facilitating social relationships through their intervention. Additionally, results may provide information on training and resources to best support individuals with aphasia and their friends.

The purpose of this study is to examine effects of aphasia on friend relationships.

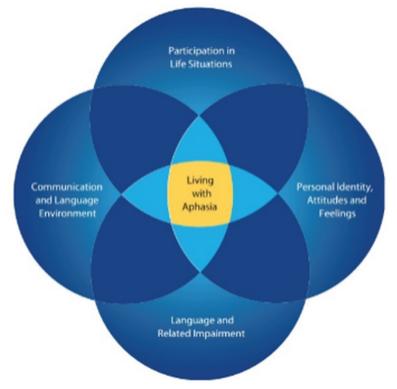


Figure 1. A-FROM Model (Kagan et al., 2008)

Method

- ❖ A 21-question digital survey was created for friends of PWA.
- ❖ Eligible participants must: be at least 18 years or older, have no history of neurologic condition, and have a friend with aphasia.
- ❖ Individuals were recruited through printed and digital fliers sent to University clinics, social media groups, and local/regional aphasia groups and rehabilitation centers.

Results

- 29 individuals accessed the survey, and 2 participants completed the survey (Fig. 2).
- ❖ Participant 1 was a 43-year-old male who had been friends with a PWA for 5 years and indicated their current understanding of aphasia to be 70/100 using a VAS within the survey.
 - ❖ Participant 2 was a 60-year-old female who had been friends with a PWA for 41 years and indicated their current understanding of aphasia to be 100/100.

Figure 2. Schematic Displaying Participant Responses to Eligibility Questions.

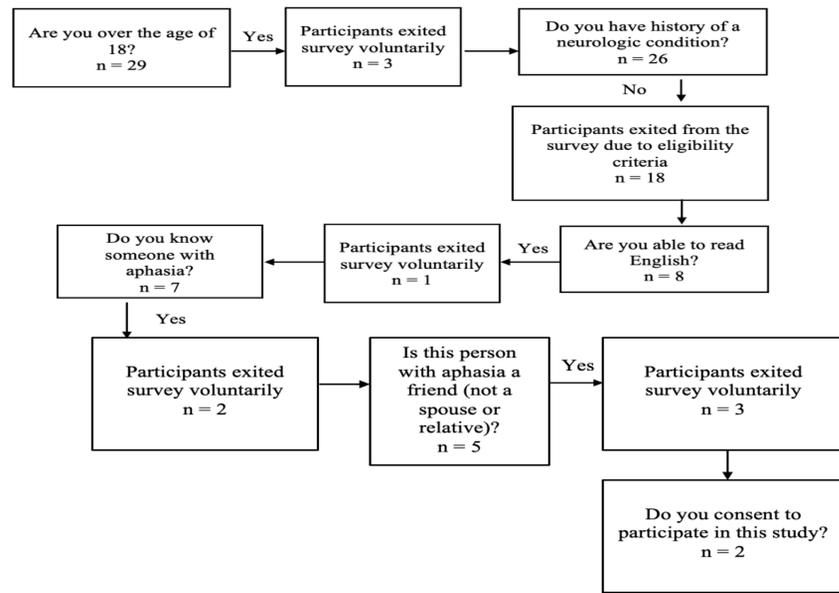
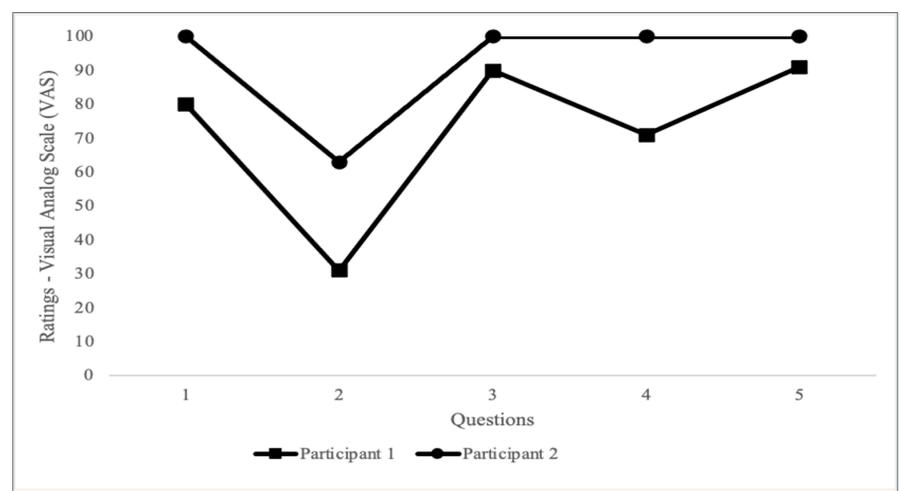


Table 1. Survey Question Key for Figure 3.

Question Number	Question
1	Communication with my friend with aphasia is enjoyable
2	Communication with my friend with aphasia is easy
3	I feel comfortable communicating with my friend with aphasia
4	I understand the impact of aphasia on communication
5	I feel involved in my friend with aphasia's life

Figure 3. Responses to Survey Questions about the Effects of Aphasia on Friendship from Participants.



Interest in an Informational Group Led by SLPs

One survey question asked participants to indicate interest in an informational aphasia group in a yes or no question format. Both participants indicated "no."

Discussion

One challenge of this study was the number of individuals who did not complete the eligibility questions and therefore were either not eligible or choose to not enter the survey. These limitations may be due to:

- ❖ PWA seeking friendship in other PWA (Brown et al., 2012).
- ❖ spouses or children of PWA taking a caregiving role (Le Dorze & Signori, 2010), therefore increasing the amount of time they are present in social interactions.

Both participants reported moderate to high perceived knowledge of aphasia which may explain their responses of "no" to interest in aphasia friendship group led by an SLP. Further, the authors may need to provide a more detailed description of such a group.

Both participants reported communication was not easy, but both reported high ratings of enjoyment. Ease of communication was rated lowest for both participants.

Conclusions and Future Research

A greater understanding of aphasia may positively impact communication experiences, though challenges remain in maintaining ease of communication. The topic of aphasia and friend relationships requires additional research to understand how SLPs and other professionals can best serve individuals with aphasia. Results revealed difficulty accessing this population of individuals. Future research may include finding novel ways to access friends of PWA.

Acknowledgements

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