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ABSTRACT

Background

Aphasia is often associated with psychosocial changes that may affect health-related quality of life, risk of depression or social participation. One possible intervention to address these psychosocial changes is peer contact. However, this often requires professional support (e.g. supervised support groups), whereas a digital option may allow for autonomous, asynchronous peer contact. Therefore, we developed an app adapted to the specific needs of people with aphasia to stimulate digital and analogue interactions.

Aims

The aim of the study was to evaluate a tailored app for people with aphasia that can be used to establish peer contact and enable digital and analogue interactions. The impact of using the app on health-related quality of life, social participation and depression prevention was analysed.

Methods & Procedures

The study design was a pre-post wait-list-controlled comparison in which half of the participants ($n = 18$) waited three months before starting the intervention, and the other half of the participants ($n = 18$) started the intervention immediately. During the intervention, the app was used by all participants ($n = 36$) for three months after a training session, followed by three months of optional app use until follow-up. Health-related quality of life (SAQOL39g, GHQ-12), communicative participation (CPIB), social support (F-SozU), depression markers (GDS, DISCs), and activity in the app were recorded at each time point. Analyses were mainly non-parametric to calculate changes during the intervention and to compare the intervention with the waiting period. The study is registered in the German Register of Clinical Trials (DRKS00023855).

Outcomes & Results

SAQOL-39g data improved significantly for the whole group during the intervention period ($z = -3.043$, $p = 0.002$, $r = -0.598$), but not during the waiting period ($z = 0.402$, $p = 0.705$). Scores remained stable until follow-up, and there was no

worsening of depression markers over the entire period. No linear correlation was found between the improvement in SAQOL-39g and activity in the app ($p = 0.329$, $r = 0.167$).

Conclusions

People with aphasia were able to use the app and showed an intervention-specific effect on health-related quality of life. The amount of activity in the app seems to be less critical for changes. Other factors, such as feeling connected to peers, appear to be relevant. Future studies should explore who might benefit most from the app.