

Stroke and self-identity among people of advanced older age: A biographical approach

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The population is ageing and more people are living with chronic conditions, in particular stroke which is the leading cause of adult disability in England. Although there has been much sociological research on the experience of chronic illness in relation to identity and biography there are few studies exploring the meaning of chronic illness for people in advanced older age (defined here as 75 years and over). There is also little research on identity in old age more generally.

This thesis will aim to address these gaps by focusing on self-identity and self-presentation following stroke, in the context of older people's lives, including work and retirement. This research also aims to assess the relevance of the theory of chronic illness as biographical disruption (Bury, 1982) and other related biographical concepts. Biographical-narrative interviews are being carried out with patients aged 75 and over, from mainly working class inner city backgrounds recruited from the South London Stroke Register to explore the experience and meaning of stroke in relation to the self-identity of people of advanced older age. The interviews are being analysed using a biographical case reconstruction method (Rosenthal, 2004) which contextualises events in terms of individual's wider life histories and circumstances.

This presentation will discuss some themes from preliminary data analysis in relation to the ways stroke has disrupted or allowed continuity of identity for people of advanced older age, including a discussion of the experience of stroke in relation to employment and retirement. The ways in which participants present themselves to others following a stroke through their narratives will be discussed, drawing on Goffman's (1969) work on the presentation of self.