

Navigating the return to life and work while experiencing fatigue after stroke



Jessica Vollertsen
Reg. OT, PhD-student



Anna-Karin Norlin
MD, PhD



Mathilda Björk
Reg. OT, Professor

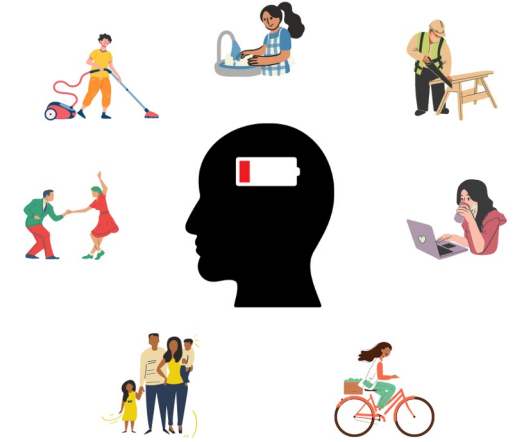


Elin Ekbladh
Reg. OT, Associate Professor

Background

- In Sweden, about 21,000 people suffer a stroke every year, with one in six aged between 20 and 60 years
- 50% of working age people experience post stroke fatigue
- Post stroke fatigue mainly impacts the performance of complex activities and is therefore a life-limiting condition
- Work is regarded as a complex activity but often not included as a natural part of everyday life in research





Aim

The aim was to describe how persons of working age who experience fatigue after stroke perceive their prerequisites for a sustainable return to work in the context of everyday life.

Methods

Design: A qualitative study supplemented with quantitative descriptive data

Participants: (n = 48)

- 29 – 62 years, who experienced a stroke within the past five years

Data collection: The Worker Role Interview (WRI)

- Assesses psychosocial factors influencing return to work.
- Focuses on motivation, lifestyles, environment and captures the person's work potential
- Semi-structured telephone interviews
- 16 WRI rated and written notes added

Analysis: Qualitative content analysis on the written WRI-item notes. Descriptive statistics of survey data and WRI-item ratings.



Results - Participants characteristic (n = 48)

Sex, n (%)

Women

Age (mean \pm SD)

Mental Fatigue Scale, n (%) (n = 43)

Mental fatigue

Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, n (%)

No Anxiety

No Depression

Working status, n (%)

Working 100%

Working 25-75%

Sick leave 100%

Sickness compensation 100% (early retirement)

37 (77)

49 \pm 7

39 (89)

24 (59)

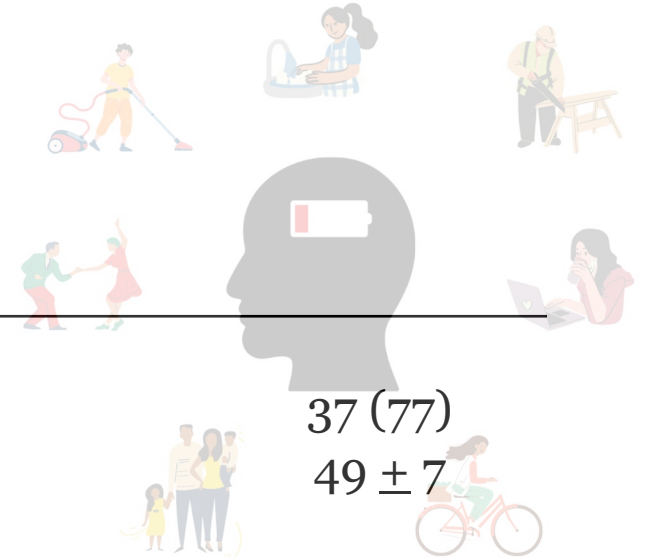
32 (80)

7 (15)

28 (58)

11 (23)

2 (4)



Results – WRI item ratings



Supportive items for returning or maintaining work: *'Commitment to work'*, *'Enjoyment of work'* and *'Appraisal of work expectations'*

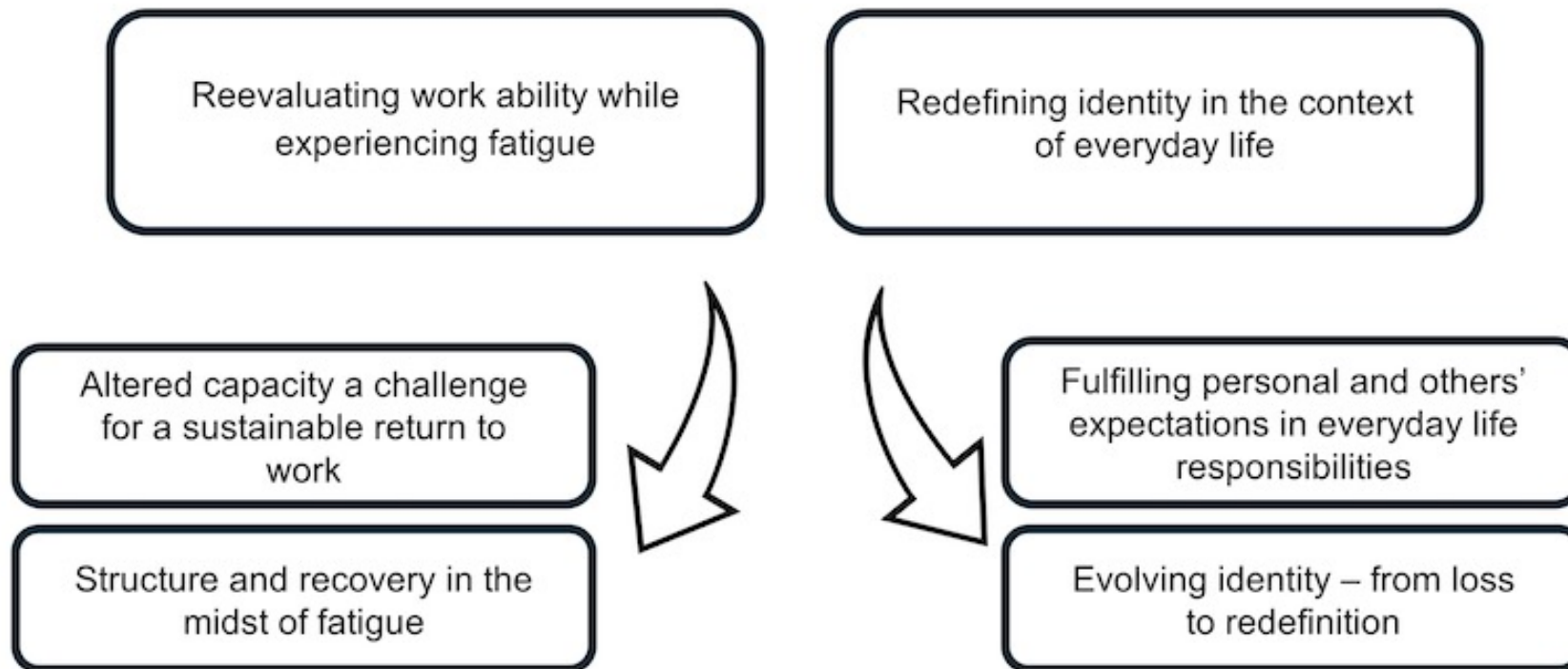
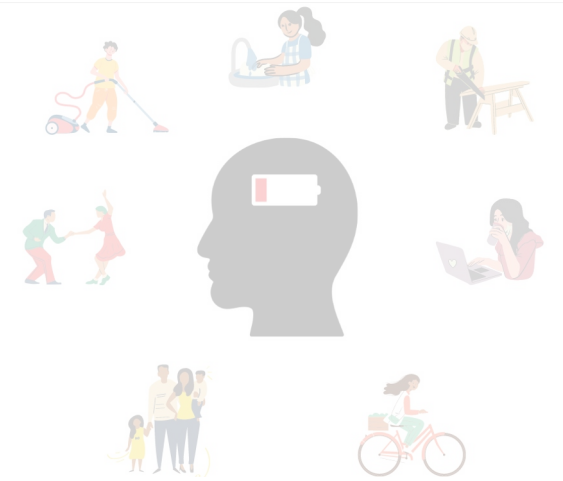
- Work is considered a valued and stimulating occupation
- The participants possess an understanding of what the worker role requires



Interfering items for returning to work or maintaining work: *'Expectations of job success'*, *'Pursuit of interests'* and *'Perception of work setting'*

- Uncertainty regarding their belief in their possibility of being able to return to or remain in work
- Challenges to find a meaningful life
- Uncertainty whether the workplace could be adapted

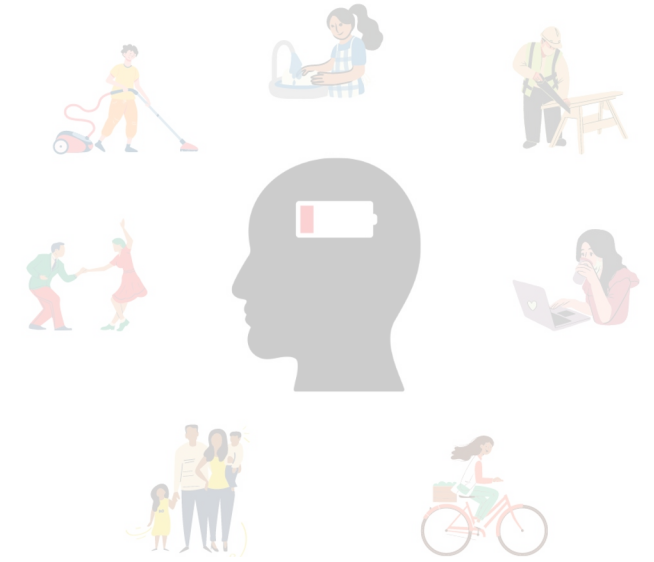
Results – qualitative content analysis



Clinical implications

- ✓ Rehabilitation must target occupational identity, not only work capacity
- ✓ Fatigue management requires sustained, individualized support
- ✓ Return-to-work depends on active employer collaboration

Reference: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/11038128.2026.2613621>



Thank you for listening!

mathilda.bjork@liu.se

PhD student jessica.vollertsen@liu.se



Campus Norrköping
Linköping University, Sweden