Brandi Nicole Fender, Psychology

Year in School: Senior
Faculty Mentors: Dr. David L. Mount, Psychological Sciences and Dr. Brick Johnstone, Health Psychology

Determining the needs for health-related services and level of community participation for Missourians living with epilepsy

The study was conducted to determine the demographic, medical, and psychiatric characteristics of persons with epilepsy living in Missouri. Forty-three participants were randomly selected through outpatient neuropsychology and medical clinics, state vocational services, and an epilepsy support organization. Participants were interviewed via phone or face-to-face. For the persons diagnosed with epilepsy ≥ 3 years (n=39), the average seizure duration was 20.0 years (SD=13.9), and the majority of participants were treated with anti-seizure medication (86.1%), whereas 39.6% were treated with ≥ 2 anti-seizure medications. The most frequently reported seizure types were Grand mal (72.1%), Absence (34.9%), and Partial (18.6%). Participants were primarily rural residents (62.8%), middle age (mean average=39.9, SD=12.43), and Caucasian (83.7%) and only 11.6% were African-Americans. The mean education level was 12.1 years, and the gender distribution was equivalent (gender: Male= 51.2%; Female=48.8%). Forty-four percent of participants were single and 37% were married. Ninety-one percent of participants had received ≤ 2 neuropsychological evaluations, but 72.1% reported problems with their cognitive abilities, while only 28% reported receiving cognitive education strategies. Fifty-three percent of the participants reported a diagnosis of mental illness, 27.9% reported a history of psychiatric hospitalization, and 20.9% reported history of attempted suicide. The results suggest healthcare providers need to consider screening not only for cognitive concerns but also psychological problems including suicidal ideation and attempts for persons with epilepsy and refer for additional services when appropriate.