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Symptom Frequency and Persistence in the First Year after Traumatic Brain Injury: A TRACK-TBI Study

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Abstract

Symptom endorsement after traumatic brain injury (TBI) is common acutely post-injury and is associated with other adverse outcomes. Prevalence of persistent symptoms has been debated, especially in mild TBI (mTBI). A cohort of participants ≥ 17 years with TBI ($n = 2039$), 257 orthopedic trauma controls (OTCs), and 300 friend controls (FCs) were enrolled in the TRACK-TBI study and evaluated at 2 weeks and 3, 6, and 12 months post-injury using the Rivermead Post-Concussion Symptoms Questionnaire (RPQ). TBI participants had significantly higher symptom burden than OTCs or FCs at all times, with average scores more than double. TBI cases showed significant decreases in RPQ score between each evaluation ($p < 0.001$), decreasing ~ 1.7 points per month between 2 weeks and 3 months and 0.2 points per month after that. More than 50% of the TBI sample, including $>50\%$ of each of the mild and moderate/severe TBI subsamples, continued to endorse three or more symptoms as worse than pre-injury through 12 months post-injury. A majority of TBI participants who endorsed a symptom at 3 months or later did so at the next evaluation as well. Contrary to reviews that report symptom resolution by 3 months post-injury among those with mTBI, this study of participants treated at level 1 trauma centers and having a computed tomography ordered found that persistent symptoms are common to at least a year after TBI. Additionally, although symptom endorsement was not specific to TBI given that they were also reported by OTC and FC participants, TBI participants endorsed over twice the symptom burden compared with the other groups.

Keywords: TRACK-TBI; post-concussion symptoms; post-traumatic symptoms; traumatic brain injuries.

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