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Author(s): Lynn Legg, Russel Tilney, Cheng Fang Hsieh, Simiao Wu, Erik Lundström, Ann-Sofie Rudberg, Mansur Kutlubaev, Martin Dennis, Babak Soleimani, Amanda Barugh, Maree Hackett, Graeme Hankey, and Gillian Mead

Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) for stroke recovery

Lynn A Legg, PhD. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health, Paisley, UK

Russel Tilney, MD. Department of Medicine, Mater Dei Hospital, Msida, Malta

Cheng-Fang Hsieh, MD. Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology, Department of Internal Medicine and Department of Neurology, Kaohsiung Medical University Hospital, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Simiao Wu, PhD. Department of Neurology, West China Hospital, Sichuan University, Chengdu, China

Erik Lundström, MD, PhD. Department of Neuroscience, Neurology, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden

Ann-Sofie Rudberg, MD. Department of Clinical Neurosciences, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden; Department of Neurology, Danderyd Hospital, Danderyd, Sweden

Mansur A Kutlubaev, MD, PhD. Department of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Medical Genetics, Bashkir State Medical University, Ufa, Russian Federation

Martin Dennis, MD. Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

Babak Soleimani, MBChB, BMedSci. Department of Stroke Medicine, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK; Department of General Medicine, Borders General Hospital, Melrose, UK

Amanda Barugh, PhD. Department of Geriatric Medicine, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

Maree L Hackett, PhD. The George Institute for Global Health, Faculty of Medicine, University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

Graeme J Hankey, MD. Medical School, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences,, The University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

Gillian E Mead, MD. Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK*

*Contact person: Gillian E Mead

Centre for Clinical Brain Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Room S1642, Royal Infirmary, Little France Crescent, Edinburgh, EH16 4SA, UK
E-mail: gillian.e.mead@ed.ac.uk

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Background

Stroke is a major cause of adult disability. The 2012 Cochrane Review of SSRIs for stroke recovery demonstrated positive effects on recovery. We updated this review in 2019 because a large trial of fluoxetine for stroke recovery (Fluoxetine or Control Under Supervision, FOCUS) was published in December 2018.

Objectives

To determine if SSRIs are more effective than placebo or usual care at improving outcomes in people less than 12 months post-stroke, and to determine associations with adverse effects.

Search methods

We searched several electronic databases up to July 2018, trials registers and grey literature.

Selection criteria

We selected all randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of any SSRI treatment versus no usual care or placebo recruiting patients who had had a stroke in the previous year. Trials had to collect data on at least one of our primary (disability score or independence) or secondary outcomes (impairments, depression, anxiety, quality of life, fatigue, healthcare cost, death, adverse events and leaving the trial early).

Data collection and analysis

Two review authors independently extracted data and assessed risk of bias. We calculated standardised mean differences (SMDs), and risk ratios (RRs) as appropriate. We restricted the primary analysis to studies at low risk of bias.

Main results

We identified a total of 63 eligible trials recruiting 9168 participants. About half the trials required participants to have depression to enter the trial. The duration, drug, and dose varied between trials. Meta-analysis of the three trials at low risk of bias found no effect of SSRI on disability score (SMD -0.01 ; 95% CI -0.09 to 0.06 ; $P = 0.75$; 2 studies, 2829 participants) or independence (RR 1.00 ; 95% CI 0.91 to 1.09 ; $P = 0.99$; 3 studies, 3249 participants) (see Figure). We downgraded both these outcomes for imprecision.

Figure: Forest plot of the outcome independence; comparing SSRIs with usual care or placebo. CI indicates confidence interval.

SSRIs reduced the depression scores but increased gastrointestinal side effects. When all trials were included irrespective of risk of bias, SSRIs reduced disability scores but not dependence.

Authors' conclusions and implication

There is no reliable evidence that SSRIs should be used routinely to promote recovery after stroke.

Implications for research

This review will be updated again when two large ongoing trials are published in 2020.

Disclosures

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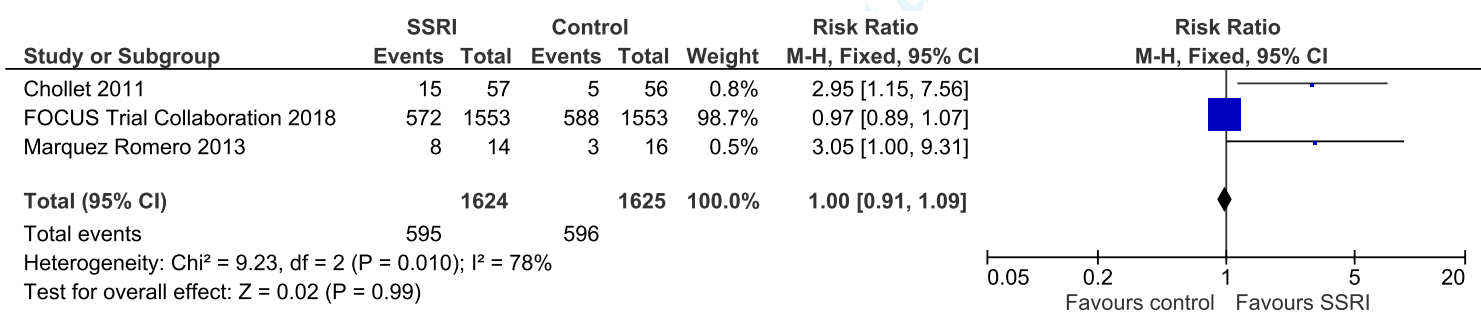
This paper is based on a Cochrane Review published in The Cochrane Library 2019, Issue 11 (see www.thecochranelibrary.com for information). Cochrane Reviews are regularly updated as new evidence emerges and in response to feedback, and The Cochrane Library should be consulted for the most recent version of the review.

Reference

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Figure: Forest plot of the outcome independence; comparing SSRIs with usual care or placebo. CI indicates confidence interval.



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