



Limited public literacy regarding aphasia and challenges to public awareness

Baixo letramento da população sobre a afasia e os desafios para a conscientização pública

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To present reflections on the Brazilian population's interest in the term aphasia over the past 21 years. **Methods:** A search was conducted on Google Trends using the term "aphasia", and the normalized relative volume (NRV) was analyzed, ranging from 0 to 100. The analysis was conducted in June 2025 and included NRV data from June 2004 to June 2025. Possible trends in the time series were analyzed using the Mann-Kendall trend test, performed with R software version 4.2.3, considering a 5% significance level. **Results:** No statistically significant upward trend was observed in the search volume over the time series studied ($\tau = 0.0835$, $p\text{-value} = 0.06345$). The search peak occurred in 2022, reaching an NRV of 100. **Conclusion:** Over the 21-year series, no increase was observed in the volume of searches for aphasia, which may suggest that the population does not seek information on this topic on Google due to a lack of awareness about this health condition.

Keywords: Aphasia; Public awareness; Infodemiology; Health literacy; Internet access

RESUMO

Objetivo: apresentar reflexões acerca do interesse da população brasileira pelo termo "afasia" nos últimos 21 anos. **Métodos:** foi realizada uma pesquisa no Google Trends com o termo "afasia" e verificado o volume de pesquisa relativa normalizada (VPR), que pode variar de zero a 100. Esta análise foi realizada em junho de 2025 e considerou o VPR de junho de 2004 a junho de 2025. Possíveis tendências na série temporal foram analisadas por meio do teste de tendência de Mann-Kendall, utilizando o software R versão 4.2.3, considerando o nível de significância de 5%. **Resultados:** não foram observadas tendências estatísticas de crescimento no volume de busca ao longo da série temporal estudada ($\tau = 0,0835$, $p\text{-valor} = 0.06345$). O pico de busca ocorreu em 2022, atingindo o VPR de 100. **Conclusão:** Ao longo da série temporal de 21 anos não foi observado um aumento no volume de buscas por afasia que pode sugerir que a população não se informa sobre esta temática no Google por falta de conhecimento desta condição de saúde.

Palavras-chave: Afasia; Conscientização pública; Infodemiologia; Letramento em saúde; Acesso à internet

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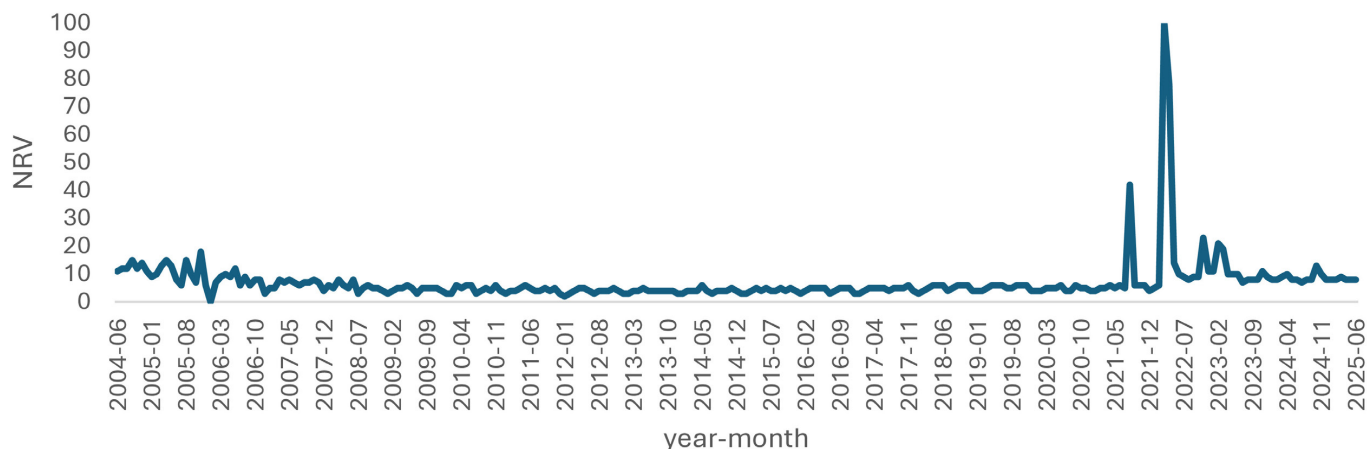


Figure 1. Temporal trend of searches for the term “aphasia” on Google Trends
Subtitle: NRV = Normalized Relative Volume, ranging from 0 to 100

The purpose of this letter is to reflect on the Brazilian population’s interest in aphasia over the past 21 years. Speech-language therapy is the treatment of choice and early intervention is crucial for optimal therapeutic outcomes in aphasia. Public and healthcare professionals’ awareness is key for accurate diagnosis and treatment. Analyzing search patterns for aphasia on the internet can indicate the population’s interest in the subject.

A search was conducted on Google Trends using the term “aphasia”, and the normalized relative search volume (NRV) was examined, ranging from zero to 100. This analysis was conducted in June/2025 and covered the NRV from June/2004 (marks the beginning of data collection by Google Trends) to June/2025. The mean NRV during the studied time series was 6.96 (standard deviation = 8.35), and the median was 5 (interquartile range = 4.00). Possible trends in the time series were analyzed using the Mann-Kendall trend test, with R software, considering a 5% significance level. The results did not indicate a significant upward trend in the search volume over the studied time series ($\tau=0.0835$, $p\text{-value}=0.06345$) (Figure 1).

There was a peak in searches for information about aphasia in 2022, likely related to Bruce Willis’s diagnosis, publicly disclosed in March of that year⁽¹⁾. Although media coverage varied in accuracy, at times distorting the relationship between aphasia and frontotemporal dementia, the visibility generated by the case led to a notable increase in public interest⁽¹⁾.

Despite aphasia significantly impacting the quality of life of a large proportion of stroke survivors, and despite awareness campaigns - such as Aphasia Awareness Month promoted by the “Sociedade Brasileira de Fonoaudiologia - (SBFa)” since 2017⁽²⁾ - the absence of a continuous increase in online searches suggests a stagnation in public awareness. This deficiency compromises early access to diagnosis and speech-language intervention.

It is crucial to identify and implement effective strategies to promote public awareness and understanding of aphasia, necessitating further research and broad-reaching outreach actions involving various media channels. Awareness strategies must aim to enhance recognition of the term, disseminate a clear and accurate understanding of the condition, and influence the development of public policies.

One of the main challenges is terminological confusion, with “aphasia” often replaced by imprecise terms like “communication difficulty after stroke”⁽³⁾, which hinders public understanding and perpetuates myths. To address this, campaigns should consistently use the term “aphasia” and debunk common misconceptions^(3,4).

A unified message, institutional collaboration, a focus on the general public, and impact evaluation are essential to effective awareness campaigns⁽⁴⁾. Social media plays a vital role by sharing personal stories and involving public figures, increasing visibility and spreading accurate information^(4,5). Strategic use of digital platforms can boost engagement and promote ongoing awareness among both the public and healthcare professionals⁽⁶⁾.

Campaigns also should take place in public spaces and involve groups that regularly interact with people with aphasia, offering targeted training to reduce communication barriers⁽⁷⁾. Including individuals with aphasia and their families in campaign development is essential, as their experiences offer valuable insights for effective communication^(4,8).

Raising awareness about aphasia and the importance of speech-language therapy in improving quality of life is a crucial step toward developing effective public policies and ensuring access to comprehensive care, recognizing past efforts and building future actions.

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