

0221

Strategies Older Adults Use to Participate in Everyday Occupations at Home and in the Community

Juanita Murphy, Clare Hocking

Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

Introduction

The New Zealand government has adopted a policy of 'Ageing in Place', and continuing to live at home is the goal of many older New Zealanders. While it is well known that participation in everyday occupations can be challenging, there is some evidence that older people devise practical solutions to the difficulties they encounter, such as opening medication bottles and remembering phone numbers. The purpose of this study was to identify the strategies older people adopt or devise to manage aspects of daily life that they find difficult to accomplish, so that those strategies can be shared with others.

Objective

To supplement occupational therapists' knowledge of ways to assist people to manage at home with the strategies older people devise for themselves.

Methods

In this interpretive study, nine older men and women who live in a town or city in New Zealand were interviewed about the ways they accomplish the ordinary things they need and want to do, at home and in the community. Participants were selected because they either received assistance with self care or domestic tasks or provided that assistance to their spouse. We assumed that because they were experiencing difficulty with managing at home and, because New Zealanders are self-reliant, practical people, that they would have found their own solutions. Qualitative descriptive methods were used to analyse the data.

Results

The strategies identified fell into four categories; keeping me safe, accepting and recruiting help, meeting biological and social needs, and conserving resources. While some strategies align with occupational therapy theory, there are valuable new insights and some strategies that might be widely applicable.

Conclusion

The findings confirm that older people devise their own strategies to manage occupational challenges, and reveal what prompts them to overcome barriers to participation. Knowing this, therapists can tailor the advice they give to older people, hand on some of these suggestions, and remember to ask about strategies clients already use.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

Information about specific strategies older people use to enable participation, and what they are trying to achieve.