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User perspective on assistive technology. A qualitative analysis of 55 letters from citizens applying for assistive technology

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Assistive devices for people with disability have developed from prosthetic equipment and are thus deeply rooted in the medical health culture. Furthermore they seem mostly to be a professional work area. On this basis one wonders what perspective people with disabilities have on assistive technology? Is it a perspective of a technical aid for daily living? Or is it something else based on a special lifestyle?

This study focuses on user perspectives on assistive technology and the objectives are to achieve a deeper knowledge of and to establish core elements related to user perspectives.

Naturally occurring data in the form of 55 letters from 33 Danish citizens applying for assistive technology were analyzed using deductive content analysis and an inductive thematic analysis. The study took a constructionist position and had a phenomenological approach.

The findings of the study establish the following as core aspects of user perspectives on assistive devices: quality of life, realization of personal goals, keeping up roles, positive self image, personal dignity, independence, activities and participation, self-care and security, lack of access in surroundings, professional domination of assistive device area, cultural stigma of negative symbolic value, and cumbersome standardized devices. The thematic analysis revealed that the users found that 'mastering and managing' was the central aspect of assistive technology, which seems to enhance their mastering and managing abilities so that they can fulfill their objectives of life through adequate occupations.

The findings furthermore accentuated that inaccessible surroundings both physical and socio-cultural as well as poor design of the devices seemed to influence user perspectives negatively. Poor service delivery also seems to influence user perspectives negatively. The findings also shed light on the importance of the socio-psychological and spiritual factors, which seemed to be included in user perspectives on assistive technology.

The study concludes that there is a knowledge gap regarding user perspectives on assistive technology and it accentuates that the practice of occupational therapy in the area of service delivery of assistive technology must focus on the clients' mastering and managing abilities rather than exercising their ability to perform activities of daily living.