

Walking as Co-occupation: The Construction of a Photo Story by an Older Couple

Fenna Van Nes^{1,2}, Hans Jonsson⁴, Tineke Abma³, Dorly Deeg¹

¹*EMGO Institute, VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam, Netherlands,* ²*Amsterdam School for Health Professions, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands,* ³*Medical Humanities, VU University Medical Center, Amsterdam, Netherlands,* ⁴*Division of Occupational Therapy, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden*

Introduction

Co-occupation, the things people do together, is a relatively new concept in occupational science. Knowledge about the co-occupations of ageing couples with functional limitations is important, because like occupations in general, performing co-occupations might contribute to health and well-being. Understanding the meaning of co-occupations is complex, because more than one person is involved. Therefore, qualitative research methods might benefit from new forms of data gathering that make both individual and joint meanings visible.

Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the meaning one older couple experienced in one of their co-occupations.

Methods

One couple was selected from a longitudinal, qualitative, multiple case study. The participating couple had physical limitations. Data were collected with individual and joint interviews. Intra-case analysis showed walking had been a very meaningful occupation for this couple in their life. To further investigate this, photos of the couple were taken whilst walking. The couple selected the 8 photos they considered to show best how they experienced walking. Their motivations for the selection were audio recorded. Narrative and visual analyses resulted in a photo-supported narrative.

Results

The photo-supported narrative shows the complexity of the meaning of walking for the couple. Both experienced togetherness as well as support. There were also different meanings for each of them and differences from that experienced in the past.

Conclusion

The analysis of this co-occupation showed the complexity of joint and personal meanings. It can be expected that meaning of co-occupations for other couples is also complex. The use of photos contributed to methodological rigour, because the selection invited the couple to further explore and express meaning and to discuss the similarities and differences in their experiences.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of Occupational Therapy

This study provides a deeper understanding of co-occupation and gives an example of how photo selection might be used to elicit meaning. This may be used in occupational therapy, but further exploration would be needed to determine for whom and under what circumstances the use of photos is suitable.