

Ageing Couples' Experiences of Their Everyday Occupations: First Phase of a Longitudinal Qualitative Study

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Introduction

Ageing persons with functional limitations may have problems in their everyday occupations. Everyday occupations are influenced by the social environment. Being able to perform meaningful occupations contributes to health and well-being. Therefore, not only are older married persons with functional limitations themselves at risk of a further decline of their health, but also their spouses. However, there is limited knowledge about the mutual influence of spouses on the couple's everyday occupations, about how they experience their occupations and about changes they might experience in their everyday occupations whilst ageing with functional limitations.

Objectives

This study aims to explore and understand ageing couples' experiences of their everyday occupations.

Methods

The study consists of the first phase of a longitudinal, qualitative, multiple case study. From the Longitudinal Ageing Study Amsterdam (LASA), nine respondents with increasing functional limitations were purposefully selected for the study together with their spouses. The study is ongoing and consists of three one-yearly data gatherings. Each couple's data are collected with a combination of individual and joint interviews. Analysis of the first data collection cycle followed a narrative approach and consisted of intra- case analyses followed by a comparative cross-case analysis.

Results

Couples experience change and continuity in the meanings of their everyday activities. Meanings experienced in their everyday occupations are related to 'maintaining physical and mental health'; 'keeping up with the outer world' and 'daily timing'. These findings are discussed in relation to occupational science and to occupational therapy.

Conclusion

The findings indicate how older couples perceive their everyday occupational life. It shows how they experience a change of meaning in many everyday occupations and how they face the challenges they encounter due to their physical limitations.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

The findings will contribute to a better understanding of how older couples perceive their meaningful occupations changing over time. This knowledge may have implications for (preventative) occupational therapy for older people with increasing functional limitations and their spouses.