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Influences of the social environment on engagement in occupations: The experience of persons with rheumatoid arthritis

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Introduction: Social support can be regarded as a crucial aspect for people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA). However, the aspects that have generally been considered in research are those that indirectly influence engagement in occupations. Consequently, the width of interactions that people have with other persons in their social environment while engaging in occupations are rarely studied from the perspective of people with RA. The same is true of the characteristics of these interactions.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to describe and enhance the understanding of how persons with RA experience the influence of the social environment on their engagement in occupations.

Methods: Nine persons were interviewed and the data obtained were analysed using a comparative method.

Result: The findings revealed that other persons in the social environment influenced informants' experiences of engaging in occupations in two ways, which formed the categories: "Constructive collaboration" and "Insufficient collaboration". These categories had certain properties related to the actions the others undertook to assist the informants during their collaboration. These assisting actions influenced the informants' possibilities to engage in occupations, and also their experience of engagement. The findings also showed that the "Conditions for collaboration" varied and influenced their collaboration, which thereby constituted a third category.

Conclusion: The findings may contribute to a deeper understanding of how other persons can facilitate and restrict meaningful occupational experiences.

Contribution to the practice: This provides knowledge that can be used by occupational therapists when empowering their clients and those close to them to reflect on their actions and the consequences of these actions to enhance occupational engagement.