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“No-one picks me up when I fall”: The carer’s experience of falling.

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Introduction:

Older people with dementia are twice as likely to fall as cognitively normal older people with higher incidence of serious injury, dependence in everyday occupations and mortality as a consequence. Carers of older people with dementia themselves have an increased risk of physical and mental ill health and unsurprisingly carer burden is said to increase when the care recipient falls.

Objectives:

Older people with dementia and their carers were asked about experiences of falling to ascertain possible implications for occupational therapy practice. This presentation will concentrate on the carers’ experiences.

Method:

A total of 27 carers from London, UK participated in two phases of this qualitative mixed-method study, involving 1:1, joint or focus group semi-structured interviews. Phase 1 used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to gain an understanding of the carers’ experiences. Phase 2 used an inductive thematic analysis to gain elaboration and deeper understanding of these experiences. Participants were asked to consider potential reasons and discuss the consequences of the falls experienced. They considered what they could do or what help they would want as a result of the fall.

Results:

Carers shared their perspectives of the falls of their care recipient; and also shared experiences of their own falls. Three emerging themes will be discussed with examples from the carers’ narrative - having support, loss and change, occupational challenges.

Conclusion:

Carers of older people with dementia struggle to preserve the personhood and occupations of the care recipients as well as their own health and wellbeing. These are often considered as separate issues by service providers.

Contribution to occupational therapy practice:

Occupational therapists are recommended to consider the intertwined needs of the older person with dementia and the carer more in intervention to prevent and minimise the current consequences of falls for both clients and carers.