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"Autonomy in Everyday Life": An occupational therapy framework

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Introduction:

Autonomy has been described in different ways in various disciplines, including it being: a psychological need and defining aspect of motivation (1); a cognitive process involving agency (2); a component of independence (3), and relating to functional ability (4). Autonomy is widely thought to be beneficial, but these claims are poorly supported by evidence. The impact of autonomy has not been fully considered by occupational therapists or understood as part of occupational engagement.

Objectives:

This paper presents the occupational therapy-focused framework: "Autonomy in Everyday Life", consisting of a synthesis of theory embedded in experiences of adults with physical disability.

Methods:

The framework was developed from extensive review of the literature and qualitative research incorporating interviews, diary information and field visits with adults with physical disabilities; detailed description of their lives, lifestyles and occupational patterns, and exploration of the meanings and experiences of autonomy in daily occupations.

Results:

Autonomy, when related to disabled people, raises more complex issues than are encompassed in psychological models. The "Autonomy in Everyday Life" framework proposes that autonomy involves both being in control of one's life (self-governing) and making/enacting occupational choices. It involves the **extent to which** a person feels autonomous and their **desire for** autonomy. These two elements influence the way a person views and acts upon occupational choices. A person's sense of autonomy is developed throughout the life-span: change in function influences autonomy more than the actual level of functional ability. The framework also describes environmental contexts which support differing levels of desire for autonomy. The research underpinning the framework suggests that occupational therapists need to understand autonomy and carefully consider the implications of practice on the autonomy of adults with physical disabilities.

Conclusion:

The "Autonomy in Everyday Life" framework presents a structure that enables therapists to examine their practice and consider autonomy as an essential component of occupational engagement.

Contribution to occupational therapy:

This paper presents a new framework and action-oriented strategies, to enable clinicians and researchers to consider autonomy within the context of occupational performance and engagement.

References not included - exceed word limit