

The impact of caregiving for physically disabled adults on the occupations of aging parents.

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Introduction:

Parents of children who are disabled have been identified as particularly vulnerable to stress, which may result from the extra demands of caring for a child who requires increased time and resources (Curran et al., 2001, Knussen & Sloper, 2002). When the child becomes an adult, their care needs do not decrease, and there is often extra physical demands on the parent caregivers, which are significant as they themselves begin to age. Researchers in studies with caregivers of other adults have identified that caregivers present with increased rates of depression and anxiety (Covinsky et al, 2003; Oyebode, 2003), and poorer physical health (Schulz & Beach, 1997) as a result of caregiving.

Objectives:

- 1) To identify if caring for an adult with a developmental disability has an impact upon the occupations of their aging caregivers.
- 2) What is the effect on the health, activity choice and participation, of caregiving for an adult with a developmental disability.

Methods:

Parents and non paid caregivers of adults with developmental disabilities were interviewed. The semistructured interview discussed the occupational roles and participation of the caregivers together with their thoughts, feelings and importance of caregiving. Demographics of the population were gathered, and the Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) covering eight health domains were also completed. Data was analysed using thematic analysis and descriptive statistics.

Results:

Qualitative data will be presented, reporting on both the positive and negative aspects of caregiving as reported by participants. Individual results for occupational participation and identified stress will be summarised. Participants reported both positive and negative aspects to their occupational roles.

Conclusion and contribution to occupational therapy:

Caregiving for an adult with a significant physical and intellectual disability has considerable impact on the health and occupations of their caregivers. However caregiving is also an important part of the caregivers occupational identity and roles. It is the responsibility of occupational therapists to find ways to enable both the adult with developmental disabilities and their aging caregivers to fulfil their occupational performance needs and roles.