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Care giving in early adulthood: an exploration into the occupational engagement of young adult carers

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The purpose of this study was to improve understanding of the lived experiences of young adult carers (YACs), analysing the effects of their roles and responsibilities on their occupational engagement. The aim was to gain a real-life narrative while applying occupational and life-span development theory to enhance knowledge of this under-represented group within existing research.

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was adopted, using purposive sampling and individual semi-structured interviews to gather data. Three participants, aged 18–25, took part and provided rich data of their experiences. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to improve validity. Post-transcription respondent validation further ensured trustworthiness and reduced any potential researcher bias.

Transcript data were analysed thematically, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) steps for systematic coding, with codes being used to identify emerging themes. Four overarching themes formed the basis for discussion.

The findings identified that YACs voiced both positive and negative effects on their engagement. Care giving was seen as having negative effects when participants discussed engaging in occupations to fit their role and the impact it has on their occupational identity. Positive features included caring as a recognised occupation and retaining the ability to have occupational choice moving into adulthood.

This small scale research has given a surprisingly balanced overview of a YAC's occupational engagement. The results demonstrate the potential role occupational therapists may have in facilitating occupational engagement and supporting YACs to overcome occupational risk factors. Further research could therefore explore the potential benefits of occupational therapy involvement.

Keywords

Children and families, Disadvantaged people, Occupational therapy