

Perceptions and Views of Self Neglect: A Client-Centred Perspective

Day, M.R. McCarthy, G. Leahy-Warren, P.

Introduction: Ageing populations and chronic illness increases vulnerability of older people for self-neglect. It is characterised by an inability to meet one's own basic needs and is an increasingly common problem which can be intentional or unintentional. A large number of referrals received by Adult Protection Services in Ireland are categorised as self-neglect. Self-neglect is a serious public health issue yet many adults who self-neglect are found to be indifferent to their situation. The aim of the study was to observe and describe the living circumstances of people who are deemed self-neglectful by senior case workers for Adult Protective Services in Ireland. To detail their life stories.

Methods: An exploratory descriptive research design was used. A purposive sample of eight older adults participated in guided interviews which were tape recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed. Home environments were also observed.

Results: The complexity and diversity of circumstances in which people lived their lives are portrayed in exemplar case studies. In addition the major themes that emerged are presented: early life experiences & lifestyle, disconnectivity isolation and loneliness, vulnerability, frugality and service refusal.

Conclusion: Self-neglect is a complex multidimensional phenomenon and this study provided insight into the lives and perspectives of self-neglecting older adults. Life stories depicted helplessness, fear, isolation, loss and disconnection with communities and families. Some participants were content in their environments while others disapproved or refused interventions and support. Early life experiences, lifestyle, isolation, loneliness, vulnerability frugality and service refusal were a key concern. Building and promoting relationships with the individuals is key to gaining further insights in self-neglecting older people life story.