Exploring the Impact of Insomnia on Occupation and Function in Midlife Women

Sleep is vital for health, wellbeing, and engagement in daily occupations (Howell & Pierce, 2000; Pierce, 2003). It is a restorative occupation that has been largely ignored in both occupational therapy (OT) research and clinical practice (Green, 2008; Koketsu, 2013). Sleep problems, such as insomnia, have been demonstrated to negatively affect health, quality of life, and daytime functioning (Bolge, Balkrishnan, Kannan, Seal, & Drake, 2010; Rosekind & Gregory, 2010). Sleep complaints are particularly prevalent in midlife women (Bolge et al.), yet very few studies have been conducted on this population.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of insomnia on midlife women ages 45-65, particularly in relation to how it impacts their daily occupations, performance skills, client factors, and patterns, and how they compensate and cope with any resulting impairments. Three midlife women with sleep difficulties were interviewed. The interviews were transcribed and grounded theory methodology was used to analyze the data.

Insomnia was found to negatively affect occupational functioning specifically in the areas of instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs), work, leisure, and social participation. Furthermore, it resulted in physical symptoms and impaired volition, cognition, emotional regulation, and communication, and disrupted roles and routines.

Four main themes emerged from the analysis: the existence of a reciprocal relationship between sleep and waking occupations and performance patterns; productivity and the American work ethic; minimization and stigma associated with insomnia; and social, cultural, and environmental contexts associated with sleep difficulties.

The study highlighted the need for occupational therapists to evaluate and treat sleep problems given the link between impaired sleep and occupational performance. It also underscored the need for further research given the lack of OT studies that address this area of occupation.

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References


