EXPLORATION OF WORK ACTIVITIES AMONG PEOPLE WITH YOUNG ONSET PARKINSON’S DISEASE: STRATEGIES AND ENABLERS TO MAINTAIN WORKER ROLE

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Introduction: Given that most people under the age of 55 years are expected to be working, the impact of Parkinson's Disease (PD) on work activities can be wide-ranging and cause some people to give up work prematurely.

Aims: This exploratory study was carried out to investigate the impact of younger-onset PD on work roles and activities. The research aims included: What work related activities are people with younger onset PD engaged in? What impact does PD have on work activities? What strategies do people with younger onset PD use to maintain work?

Methods: Eleven people with PD (six male, mean age 49.8 years, ranging from 44-56 years) were recruited through a national organisation. Data were collected through the PDQ-39 and in-depth interviews. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and constant-comparative analysis. Ethical permission was obtained from TCD Health Sciences Ethics Committee.

Results: Four participants were in full-time employment, six had resigned and one was studying full-time. Issues identified as interfering with work included concealment of diagnosis, reduced intonation and volume of speech, difficulty operating equipment, reduced information processing and difficulty reaching work targets. Strategies used to maintain employment included technology, cognitive strategies and assistance from co-workers.

Conclusions: The findings indicate that healthcare professionals should address work issues as early as possible post diagnosis. Interventions should focus on strategies to maintain work such as fatigue management, cognitive strategies and advice on appropriate technology. Help may also be needed with making a decision on whether to resign from work.